

Critical Examination of the Life of St. Paul

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INTRODUCTION. EPISTLE DEDICATORY TO M. L. N.

Sir, In our last conversation you appeared to me, very much smitten with St. Paul and his works; you recommended me to reperuse his writings; assuring me that I should there find arguments well calculated to shake incredulity and confirm a Christian in his faith.

Although the actions of this celebrated Apostle, related in the Acts, and his doctrine contained in his Epistles, were already perfectly known to me, yet to conform myself to your desires, and give you proofs of my docility, I have again read those works, and I can assure you that I have done it with the greatest attention. You will judge of that yourself, by the reflections I send you; they will at least prove to you that I have read with attention. A superficial glance is only likely to deceive us or leave us in error. The passions and the prejudices of men prevent them from examining with candour, and from their indolence they are often disgusted with the researches necessary for discovering truth; that has also been with so much care veiled from their eyes: but it is in vain to cover it, its splendour will sooner or later shine forth; the works of enthusiasm or imposture, will always end by betraying themselves. As for the rest, read and judge. You will find, I think, at least, some reasons for abating a little from that high opinion, that prejudice gives us of the Apostle of the Gentiles, and of the religious system of the Christians, of which St. Paul was evidently the true architect. I am not ignorant that it is very difficult to undo at one blow the ideas to which the mind has been so long accustomed; but whatever may be your judgment it will not alter the sentiments of friendship and attachment which are due to the goodness of your heart.

I am, &c, &c.

CHAPTER I. Is the Conversion of St. Paul a proof in favour of the Christian Religion?

Many theologians would make us regard the miraculous conversion and apostleship of St. Paul as one of the strongest proofs of the truth of Christianity. But in viewing the thing closely it appears that this conversion, far from proving any thing in favour of this religion, invalidates the other proofs of it, in fact, our doctors continually assure us that the Christian religion draws its strongest proofs from the prophecies of the Old Testament, whilst there is not in fact a single one of these prophecies that can be literally applied to the Messiah of the Christians. St. Paul himself willing to make use of these oracles of the Jewish nation to prove the mission of Christ, is obliged to distort them, and to seek in them a mystical, allegorical, and figurative sense. On the other side, how can these prophecies made by Jews and addressed to Jews, serve as proofs of the doctrine of St. Paul, who had evidently formed the design of altering, or even of destroying, the Jewish religion, in order to raise a new system on its ruins? Such being the state of things, what real connection, or what relation, can there be between the religious system of the Jews, and that of St. Paul? For this Apostle to have had the right of making use of the Jewish prophecies, it would have been necessary that he should have remained a Jew; his conversion to Christianity evidently deprived him of the privilege of serving himself, by having recourse to the prophecies belonging to a religion that he had just abandoned, and the ruin of which he meditated. True prophecies can only be found in a divine religion, and a religion truly divine, can neither be altered, reformed, nor destroyed: God himself, if he is immutable, could not change it.

In fact, might not the Jews have said to St. Paul, "Apostate that you are! you believe in our prophecies, and you come to destroy the religion founded upon the same prophecies. If you believe in our oracles, you are forced to believe that the religion which you have quitted is a true religion and divinely inspired. If you say, that God has changed his mind, you are impious in pretending that God could change, and was not sufficiently wise, to give at once to his people a perfect worship, and one which had no need of being reformed. On the other side, do not the reiterated promises of the Most High, confirmed by paths to our fathers, assure us, that his alliance with us should endure eternally? You are then an impostor, and, according to our law, we ought to exterminate you; seeing that Moses, our divine legislator, orders us to put to death, whoever shall have the temerity to preach to us a new worship, even though he should confirm his mission by prodigies. The God that you preach is not the God of our fathers: you say that Christ is his son; but we know that God has no son. You pretend that this son, whom we have put to death as a false prophet, has risen from the dead, but Moses has not spoken of the resurrection; thus your new God and your dogmas are contrary to our law, and consequently we ought to hold them in abhorrence." In short these same Jews might have said to St. Paul: "You deceive yourself in saying, that you are the disciple of Jesus, your Jesus was a Jew, during the whole of his life he was circumcised, he conformed himself to all the legal ordinances; he often protested that he came to accomplish, and not to abolish the law; whilst you in contempt of the protestations of

the Master, whose Apostle you say you are, take the liberty of changing this holy law, of decrying it, of dispensing with its most essential ordinances.”

Moreover the conversion of St. Paul strangely weakens the proof that the Christian religion draws from the miracles of Jesus Christ and his Apostles. According to the evangelists themselves the Jews were not at all convinced by these miracles. The transcendant prodigy of the resurrection of Christ, the wonders since wrought by some of his adherents did not contribute more to their conversion. St. Paul believed nothing of them at first, he was a zealous persecutor of the first Christians to such a degree, that, according to the Christians, nothing short of a new miracle, performed for him alone, was able to convert him; which proves to us that there was, at least, a time when St. Paul did not give any credit to the wonders that the partisans of Jesus related at Jerusalem.

He needed a particular miracle to believe in those miracles, that we are obliged to believe in at the time in which we live, without heaven operating any new prodigy to demonstrate to us the truth of them.

CHAPTER II. Opinions of the first Christians upon the Acts of the Apostles, and upon the Epistles and Person of St. Paul.

It is in the Acts of the Apostles, and the Epistles of St. Paul, that we find the details of his life and the system of his doctrine; but, how can we be certain of the authenticity of these works, whilst we see many of the first Christians doubt and reject them as apocryphal? We find, in fact, that from the earliest period of the church, entire sects of Christians, who believed that many of the Epistles published under the name of this Apostle, were not really his. The Marcionites were confident that the gospels were filled with falsehoods, and Marcion, their head, pretended that his gospel was the only true one.

The Manicheans, who formed a very numerous sect at the commencement of Christianity, rejected as false, all the New Testament, and produced other writings, quite different, which they gave as authentic. The Corinthians, as well as the Marcionites, did not admit the Acts of the Apostles. The Encratites and the Severians did not adopt either the Acts or the Epistles of St. Paul. St. John Chrysostom in a homily, which he has made upon the Acts, says, that in his time (that is to say, towards the end of the fourth century) many men were ignorant not only of the name of the author, or of the collector of these Acts, but even did not know this work. The Valentinians, as well as many other sects of Christians accused our scriptures of being filled with errors, imperfections, and contradictions, and of being insufficient without the assistance of traditions; this is a fact that is attested to us by St. Irenæus. The Ebionites or Nazarenes, who, as we shall soon see, were the first Christians, rejected all the Epistles of St. Paul, and regarded him as an impostor and hypocrite.

It will not fail being said to us, that we ought not to rely on the testimony of heretics; but I shall reply, that in the matter in question, their testimony is of the same weight as that of the orthodox, seeing that all the different sects consider themselves as orthodox, and have treated their adversaries as heretics. How shall we unravel the truth if we do not hear both parties? By what signs shall we know those on whom we ought to rely? Shall we cede the cause without examining their adversaries, to writers who utter to us falsehoods without number, who contradict each other, who are never agreed amongst themselves, and whose discordant writings are nevertheless produced as proofs of what they advance? In any other subject such a conduct would seem to betray a partiality or even insincerity: but in religious matters, every thing is fair, and there is no necessity of being so nice.

However that may be, it does not follow that because one sect has received or rejected a work, that the work itself is either true or false; there cannot be otherwise than, a diversity of opinions between persons of different parties; their testimony ought to have equal weight, until the partisans of one sect, have been convicted of being greater cheats and liars, than those of the other. If we pay no regard to the authority of heretics, it is because they have not had sufficient power to

enforce their opinions. It is power or weakness which makes orthodoxians or heretics: the last are always those who have not power enough to make their opinions current.

What course shall we then pursue to discover on which side is the truth? An impartial man will no more expect to find it in one party than in another, thus the testimony of the one can have no greater weight than that of the other in the eye of an unprejudiced man.

This granted, we cannot rely on the authority of Christian traditions which vary in all sects, and we shall be reduced to recur solely to reason, especially when we find that the works, which are to-day regarded as authentic, have in other times been considered as suppositious, or apocryphal, by some very ancient sects of Christians, and that the works and writings, then regarded as apocryphal, have since been adopted as true.

It appears that in the ancient churches, they read at once the works that we now regard as true, and those that now-pass for suppositious, in such sort, that there is reason to believe they were then held to possess equal claim to authenticity: it is, at least, very, difficult to demonstrate the contrary in the present time. Some churches have attributed the same authority to false or doubtful writings as to true.

The Roman Church to-day adopts as authentic and divinely inspired many books of the Bible, absolutely rejected by the Protestants. How is it possible to decide which is the party that deceives itself?

By what right can we then affirm to-day that the works of St. Paul, formerly rejected by so many Christian sects, are authentic, that is to say, truly belong to this Apostle? On the other hand, how can we attribute to divine inspiration writings filled with inconsistencies, contradictions, mistakes, and false reasonings, in a word, which bear every character of delirium, of ignorance, and of fraud? I acknowledge that those who want valid proofs, always do right to affirm the thing, with the tone of authority; but this tone proves nothing, and always prejudices against those who take it. Nothing is more injurious to the interest of truth, than the arrogance of an usurped authority. These are, however, the arms that are incessantly opposed to those who doubt of religion. It would seem that its defenders have no other arguments than their pretences; it is easy to feel that these arguments are every thing, but convincing.

The Acts of the Apostles, adopted by the Ebionites or Nazarenes, relate amongst other things, that, "Paul was originally a Pagan, that he came to Jerusalem where he dwelt for some time; that being desirous of marrying the daughter of the High Priest he became a proselyte, and was circumcised; but not being able to obtain the woman he desired, he quarrelled with the Jews, began to write against the circumcision, against the observation of the Sabbath, and against legal ordinances."

We know that the name of Nazarenes was the first which was given to the Christians. St. Epiphanius, from whom the preceding passage is taken, says, "that they were thus named because of Jesus of Nazareth," of whom they were the first disciples. The Jews called them Nazarenes from the Hebrew word Nozerim, which signifies one separated or excommunicated; again they designated them under the name of Mineans, that is to say, heretics. They were also by contempt called Ebionites, which signifies poor, mendicant, weak-minded. In fact, the Hebrew Ebion, means poor, miserable, and we know, that the first followers of Christ, were every thing but opulent or intelligent men.

The first faithful, were Jews converted by Jesus himself, or by the most ancient Apostles, such as Peter, James, and John, who as well as their master, lived in Judaism. These Apostles, disciples, and new converts, differed from the Jews in nothing but the belief in Jesus Christ, whom they

regarded as the Messiah predicted by the prophets; otherwise they believed themselves bound constantly to observe the Mosaic law, persuaded that their Messiah was come to accomplish and not to destroy this law. In consequence of this, they observed circumcision, the abstinence from certain meats, separation from the Gentiles, in a word, the Jewish rites and ordinances.

Thus the first Apostles, and their adherents, were only Jews, persuaded that the Messiah was already come, and was going soon to commence his reign, which made them hated and persecuted as schismatics or heretics by their fellow-citizens. St. Jerome informs us, "that even down to his time, the Jews used to anathematize the Christians, under the name of Nazarenes, three times a day in their synagogues."

All this evidently proves, that the Nazarenes, of Ebionites, were the first Christians, taught by the most considerable of the Apostles, and that the first Christians were only reformed Jews; this is clearly the only idea we can form of Christianity, such as it was taught by Jesus Christ himself.

How then comes it that since Jesus, Christianity has been so separated from Judaism? a slight attention will prove to us that this is owing to St. Paul. Repulsed by the Jews, or perhaps desirous of playing a more important part, we see him separate himself from his brethren of Jerusalem, and undertake the conversion of the Gentiles, for whom the Jews entertained no sentiment but horror. Encouraged by his first successes and wishing to extend them, he dispensed the Pagans from the painful ceremony of circumcision; he declared that the law of Moses, was only a law of servitude, from which Jesus was come to free mankind; he pretended that all the old law was merely the emblem and figure of the new; he announced himself as the Apostle of the Gentiles, and leaving Peter and the other Nazarenes to preach the gospel of circumcision, he preached his own gospel, which he himself called the gospel of uncircumcision: in a word, he made a divorce with the Jewish laws, to which his apostolic brethren believed they ought to hold themselves attached, at least, in most respects.

The conduct of Paul, must naturally have displeased his seniors in the Apostleship, but fear appears to have deter mined them to cede, at least for a time, to our missionary who had already made a considerable party. Nevertheless the Acts of the Apostles and the writings of Paul, prove to us his quarrels with his brethren, who, according to appearances, never viewed with a friendly eye, his enterprizes and innovations. Moreover, Eusebius and St. Epiphanius inform us, that our Apostle was regarded as an apostate, an impostor, and an enemy by the Ebionites, that is to say, by the first faithful. But St. Paul's party having in the end prevailed, the Jewish law was entirely banished from Christianity, and the Ebionites, or Nazarenes, though of more ancient date and though formed by Christ and his first apostles were declared heretics.

It is proper to remark in this place that these Ebionites, or first Christians, believed that Jesus was but a man, as much on the side of his father as on that of his mother, that is to say, the son of Joseph and Mary; but that he was a wise, just, and excellent person, thus meriting the appellation of the son of God, because of his holy life and good qualities whence we see that the first Christians were as well as the first Apostles, true Socinians. But St. Paul to give, without doubt, more lustre to his ministry, and his adherents after him, willing to extol the holiness of their religion, made a God of Jesus, a dogma which it is no more permitted to doubt, especially since the partizans of Paul have become more numerous, and stronger than those of St. Peter and the other Nazarenes, or Jewish founders of primitive Christianity, which thus totally changed its face as to its capital dogmas.

Having thus become masters of the field of battle, Paul, his adherents, and the disciples formed in their school, saw themselves in possession of the power of regulating belief, of inventing new

dogmas, of making gospels, and of arranging them in their own manner, of forging to themselves titles, and of excommunicating as heretics all those who showed themselves unteachable. It is thus that the author of the Acts of the Apostles, only speaks, as it were, of his master, of St. Paul, and glances very slightly over the Acts of the Apostles of the contrary party. The same author (St. Luke) is presumed to have composed his gospel from the notes furnished him by St. Paul, though he had neither known nor seen Jesus Christ.

Faustus, the Manichean, said on the subject of the gospels, "that they had been composed a long time after the Apostles, by some obscure individuals, who fearing that faith would not be given to histories of facts with which they must have been unacquainted, published under the name of the Apostles their own writings, so filled with mistakes and discordant relations and opinions, that we can find in them neither connection nor agreement with themselves."

A little further on he loudly accuses his adversaries, who had the credit of being orthodox, and says to them, "It is thus that predecessors have inserted in the writings of our Lord many things which, though they bear his name, do not # at all agree with his doctrine. That is not surprising since we have often proved that these things have not been written by himself nor by his Apostles, but that for the greater part they are founded on tales, on vague reports, and collected by I know not who, half Jews, but little agreed among themselves, who have nevertheless published them under the name of our Lord, and thus have attributed to him their own errors and deceptions."

Origeo informs us, that Celsus exclaimed against the licence that the Christians of his time, had taken of altering many times imprudently the originals of their gospels, in order to be able to deny or to retract those things, which embarrassed them.

CHAPTER III. Of the Authority of the Councils, of the Fathers of the Church, and of Tradition

It is only in the Fathers of the Church, and the Councils, that we can find the proofs of the authenticity of the Christian traditions, and according to the proofs which remain it appears, that they only approved or rejected opinions, as they found them favourable or injurious to the interests of the party which they had embraced. Every ecclesiastical writer, and every assembly of Bishops, adopted as canonical the writings in which they found their own particular dogmas, the others they treated as apocryphal or suppositious. A slight acquaintance with the writings of the Fathers, will show us that we cannot rely on them for any facts; we shall find that their books are filled with negligences, tales, impertinences and falsehoods; we shall see them buried in the thickest darkness of superstition and prejudice. Every word announces their incredulity or their insincerity. St. Clement the Roman, believed the fable of the phoenix reviving from its ashes, and cites it as a proof of the resurrection.

Papias, who was the master of St. Irenæus, was, in the opinion of Eusebius himself, a man of weak mind, a fabulous author, who had contributed to lead many men into error, and amongst others St. Irenæus who was his disciple, whom Eusebius regards as a very credulous man, though he was the first ecclesiastical historian of note. It is not surprising that those who have followed such guides have fallen into error.

On the other side, we should never finish, were we to enter into a detail of the excesses committed by the Fathers of the Church and the Councils: their history would only serve to prove their ambition their pride, their infatuation, their seditious spirit, their cheats, their intrigues, and their cruelties in the persecutions which they excited against their adversaries. It is nevertheless on the probity and on the knowledge of these great personages that we are called to rely! It is pretended that it is from them that we hold the pure oracles of truth; must we then take lessons of mildness, of charity, of holiness, from the writings of some factious individuals, who were perpetually quarrelling and treating their adversaries with the utmost cruelty, whose works were filled with gall, whose conduct it is admitted even by their own friends and admirers, was almost always unjust, violent, and criminal? How can it be expected that we should find any point of unity in the canons and decrees of assemblies agitated by intrigue, discord, and animosity? How can we regard as saints, and infallible doctors, as persons worthy of our confidence, perverse men, continually involved in disputations with others, and in contradictions with themselves? What guide can we expect to find in turbulent priests whose ambition, avarice, and intriguing and persecuting spirit are every where visible? It is only necessary to read ecclesiastical history to be convinced that the picture which we have drawn of the Councils and Fathers is no ways exaggerated.

On the other hand the writers and Councils on whose authority, Christians are called upon to found their belief, do, in all their traditions, but blindly follow and copy each other; we see them devoid of the arts of reasoning, of logic, and of criticism; hence their works are found filled with fables, vulgar errors, and forgeries. Is it possible to believe the traditions of such a man as St. Jerome, who in his life of St. Anthony, assures us that this holy man had a conference with satyrs with goats feet? Do we not justly doubt the sincerity of St. Augustine, when he says, "that he had seen a nation composed of men, who had eyes in the middle of their stomachs?" Are such authors more entitled to credit, than those of Robinson Crusoe, and of the Thousand and One Nights?

Supposing even that at the commencement of Christianity, there had been authentic books in which the actions and the discourses of Jesus Christ and his Apostles had been faithfully related, should we be justified in supposing that they have been handed down to us such as they were originally? Prior to the invention of printing, it was doubtless much easier to impose upon the public than it is now, and notwithstanding, we see that the *Press* gives currency to innumerable falsehoods.

The spirit of party causes every thing to be adopted that is useful to its own cause. That granted, how easy was it for the heads of the Church, who were once the only guardians of the holy books, either from pious fraud, or a determined wish to deceive, to insert falsehoods and articles of faith, in the books entrusted to their care.

The learned Dodwell admits, that the books which compose the New Testament did not appear in public, until at least 100 Years after Christ. If this fact be certain, how shall we convince ourselves that they existed prior to this time? These books were solely entrusted to the care of the ecclesiastical gentry, till the third or fourth century, that is to say, to the guardianship of men, whose conduct was universally regulated by self interest and party spirit, and who possessed neither the probity nor knowledge requisite for discovering the truth, or of transmitting it in its original purity. Thus each doctor had the power of making such holy books as he pleased, and when, under Constantine, the Christians saw themselves supported by the Emperor, their chiefs were able to accept, and cause to be accepted as authentic, and of rejecting as apocryphal, such books as suited their interest, or did not agree with the prevailing doctrine. But were we even sure of the authenticity of the books, which the church of this day adopts, we are nevertheless, without any other guarantee of the authority of the scriptures than the books themselves. Is there a history which has the right to prove itself by itself? Can we rely upon witnesses who give no other proof of what they advance than their own words? Yet the first Christians have rendered themselves famous by their deceptions, their factions, and their frauds, which are termed pious when they tend to the advantage of religion. Have not these pious falsehoods been ascribed to the works of Jesus Christ himself and to the Apostles his successors? Have we not, in their manner, sybilline verses, which are evidently all Christian prophecies, made afterwards, and often copied word for word into the Old and New Testament? If it had pleased the Fathers at the council of Nice, to regard these prophecies as divinely inspired, what or who should have prevented them from inserting them into the canon of the Scriptures? And from that the Christians would not have failed to regard them in the present day, as indubitable proofs of the truth of their religion.

If the Christians at the commencement of Christianity, gave credit to works filled with reveries, such as the Shepherd of Hermas, the Gospel of the Infancy, the Letter of Jesus Christ to Algarus, what confidence can we have in such of their books as remain? Can we flatter ourselves, with having even these such as they were originally written? How can we at the present time, dis-

tinguish the true from the false, in books, in which enthusiasm, roguery and credulity pervade every page.

Since the gospels themselves fail in the proofs necessary to establish their authenticity, and the truth of the facts which they relate, I do not see that the epistles of St. Paul, or the Acts of the Apostles, enjoy in this respect a greater advantage. If the first Christians had no difficulty in attributing works to Jesus, would they have been over scrupulous, in doing the same to his apostles, or in making for them romantic legends, which length of time has caused to pass for respectable books? If a body of powerful men, had it in their power to command the credulity of the people, and found it their interest, they would succeed, at the end of a few centuries, in establishing the belief that the adventures of Don Quixote were perfectly true, and that the prophecies of Nostradamus were inspirations of the divinity. By means of glossaries, commentaries and allegories, we may find and prove whatever we desire; however glaring an imposture may be, it may, by the aid of time, deception, and force, pass in the end for a truth, which it is not permitted to doubt; Determined cheats supported by public authority may cause ignorance, which is always credulous to believe whatever they choose, especially by persuading it that there is merit in not perceiving inconsistencies, contradictions, and palpable absurdities, and that there is danger in reasoning.

CHAPTER IV. Life of St. Paul, according to the Acts of the Apostles

I have thus far shewn that nothing was more destitute of proof than the authenticity of the books which contain the life and writings of St. Paul. I have shewn that the Acts of the Apostles, and the Epistles of St. Paul, were rejected by some Christian sects which subsisted from the earliest times of the church. It must have been seen that the opinion of the authenticity of these books was founded solely on traditions, to which it is very difficult to give credit, considering the characters of those by whom these traditions have been transmitted, it is however upon such suspicious guarantees, that the authority of these works has been pretended to be established; it will then be necessary to admit them at once and without examination, or else recur to reason in order to examine for ourselves, what we ought to think concerning them.

To form our ideas of St. Paul, let us then consult only these works, however suspected their origin may appear to us, which contain the detail of his life; there are no others to which we can have recourse.

The author of the Acts of the Apostles, whoever he be, relates the miraculous conversion of Saul, afterwards called Paul, in the ninth chapter. We find him already named in the two preceding chapters, first as approving of the death of St. Stephen, the first martyr for the Christian religion, and next as persecuting and desolating the church. Not contented with tormenting the Christians of Jerusalem, he furnished himself with letters from the High Priest which authorised him to seize those whom he might find at Damascus; but, while on the road a miracle caused him to change all his projects; he is suddenly surrounded by a divine light, without seeing any one, he hears the voice of Jesus of Nazareth, who demands of him the motives of his persecutions. Saul trembling enquired what conduct he ought to pursue. Jesus tells him, that at Damascus he would be informed of his intentions. Our persecutor on this occasion is struck blind, but his heart is converted, and sight is miraculously restored to him by a Christian of Damascus named Ananias, who had been, by a particular revelation informed of his hostile designs against the church, and of the great designs of God, who, of this persecutor, would form a vessel of election, that is to say the Apostle of the Gentiles.

Soon after this conversion and cure, Saul is baptized and commences preaching Christ in the synagogues, confounding the Jews to such a degree that they came to the resolution to take away his life. But the new missionary deceived their vigilance by saving himself during the night by means of a basket, in which he was lowered, and made his escape from Damascus. He returned to Jerusalem where the disciples of Jesus were thrown into consternation at his appearance; but Barnabas presented him to the Apostles, informed them of his conversion, and enrolled him to their college. In consequence he preached the Gospel; this conduct soon raised troubles and persecutions against him on the part of the Jews, who again formed the design of putting him to death. But he found means of escaping from their fury by the assistance of some disciples who conducted him to Cesarea, whence they afterward sent him to Tarsus. Barnabas came and

joined Saul in the latter city, whence he led him to Antioch. Here Saul and Barnabas remained during a year, they there made a great number of converts; it was there that the proselytes first took the name of Christians. To warm the zeal of the new converts, they sent for prophets from Jerusalem, one of these named Agabus predicted a great famine, which determined the disciples of Antioch to distribute alms to their brethren of Judea; Saul and Barnabas were the bearers of these marks of generosity, and the Apostles, whom the first faithful made the depositaries of their riches, knew, without doubt, the price of the acquisition that the sect had made in the person of the new missionary¹.

¹ Acts of Apostles, chap. 12.

CHAPTER V. St. Paul styles himself the Apostle of the Gentiles—Causes of his Success.

All proves to us that Paul and his associate Barnabas found it much easier to convert the Gentiles than the Jews, who showed themselves almost always rebels to their lessons. The docility of the first, and indocility of the latter may be traced to very natural causes; the idolators were destitute of instruction, their priests, content with exacting from them their offerings and sacrifices, never thought of instructing them in their religion; thus our missionaries encountered few obstacles in persuading them of the truth of the novelties which they came to announce to them. It was not thus with the Jews, who had a law, to which they were very strongly attached, since they were convinced that it had been dictated by God himself. In consequence our preachers could not make themselves listened to, but, in proportion, as the doctrine they preached agreed with the notions with which the Jews were previously imbued. The Apostles were therefore compelled to reason with the Jews, according to their own system, to shew them that the Christ whom they announced was the Messiah which they expected from their own prophets; in a word, in preaching the Gospel to the Jews, the preachers were driven into embarrassing discussions, and perpetually exposed to cavils and contradictions which they had no fear of on the part of the Gentiles, who received without disputing the novelties which they broached to them, and which besides agreed well enough with the notions of the pagan mythology, as we have shewn in another work.

On the other side also, the idolators had not the exclusive ideas of religion peculiar to the Jews; they were tolerant, they admitted every species of worship, and were disposed to pay homage to every God that was proposed to them. The Hebrews were not of this disposition, they believed themselves alone in the possession of the knowledge of the true God, and rejected with horror strange Gods and worships.

These reflections are sufficient to explain to us the reason of the great success that the Apostles had in preaching to the Gentiles, compared with their endeavours amongst the Jews; they likewise show us especially the true motives of Paul's conduct. In fact, repulsed by the cavils and opposition of the Jews, we see Paul and Barnabas turn themselves to the side of the Pagans, who listened to them with more attention and declared to the Jews, that God had forsaken them¹.

The Gentiles were apparently flattered by the preference; numbers of them adopted the religion announced to them, which did not hinder the Jews from exciting, against our missionaries, the zeal of the female devotees whose clamour obliged them to quit Antioch.

From thence our two associates, after having shook the dust of their feet against their opposers, repaired to Iconium, where they again met with opposition on the part of the Jews who even irritated the Gentiles against them, which compelled them to fly to Lystra in Lycaonia. There

¹ Acts of Apostles, chap. xiii. ver. 45, &c,

according to the Acts of the Apostles, Paul thought it necessary to perform a miracle, well knowing that nothing is more efficacious than a prodigy in making an impression on the minds of the vulgar.

He then cured a lame man. This miracle convinced the idolators, who took Paul and his comrade for Gods, and under this idea would have offered them sacrifices. However this wonder did not produce the same effect upon the Jews; these apparently regarded it as a deception, or some trick of which they were not the dupes. In fact we see that the Jews, who nevertheless yielded to no people in credulity, so far from being moved by Paul's miracle, that they stoned him as a malefactor and left him for dead. From this unlucky affair he however extricated himself and returned to Antioch, whence he set out in order to give an account of the success of his mission, from which it appears that he had no reason for self congratulation, since, if he made a number of recruits for Jesus, he had succeeded at the expence of much personal ill usage.

Nevertheless the Nazarenes, or Ebionites, i. e. the first of the Jews, who had embraced the doctrine of the Apostles, were persuaded that the religion of Christ was merely a reformed Judaism. Always attached to the practices of the Mosaic law, they believed themselves called upon to evince their zeal in its favour; in consequence of which they pretended that the Gentiles, converted by the Apostles, ought, like themselves, to submit to the rite of circumcision. But Paul and Barnabas strongly opposed this opinion*; they were well aware that so painful an operation, especially after a certain age, would be very likely to dishearten the heathen whom they had drawn to their sect. But as the affair appeared very important they referred the decision to the Apostles who remained at Jerusalem. In consequence Paul and Barnabas, and also the partisans of circumcision, repaired, thither, each with the view of maintaining their own opinion. The question was argued, and our two missionaries convinced the Apostolic College of the necessity of freeing the Gentiles from a rite at which they revolted. Thus, according to the author of the Acts of the Apostles, (who appears to have been devoted to St. Paul's party) it was decided, that the newly converted Gentiles should be exempted from a ceremony which, until now, had been regarded as highly essential, since it had been ordained by the Divinity himself.

There is reason to believe that the old Apostles did not subscribe without great reluctance to a decision which seemed to annul one of the capital points of the Mosaic law, and had the appearance of rectifying the ordinances, of the Most High. Jesus himself in his infancy underwent the ceremony of circumcision; during his life he practised the customs prescribed to his nation; he formerly declared that he was come, not to destroy, but to accomplish the law of the Jews; and nevertheless we see St. Paul and his adherents, of their own authority, annul at one blow a ceremony of divine institution, approved of and observed by their master and that for political and worldly considerations, which saints ought never to regard.

However this may be, by this decision, which Paul extorted from the Apostles, it seemed from that time to give the signal of the schism, which in the end totally separated the Jews from the Christians. Nevertheless we shall soon see Paul, who on this occasion took in hand the cause of the Gentiles, prepare (resuming the old errors) and circumcise a disciple himself. So true it is, that the greatest saints are not always consistent in their opinions, nor uniform in their conduct.

The Apostles having shewn so much indulgence in the article of the circumcision of the Gentiles, were, however desirous of giving a kind of satisfaction to the partisans of Judaism; with this view they prohibited the new converts from worshipping idols, from giving themselves up to fornication; and ordered them to abstain from things strangled and from the blood of animals. By these means they sought to conciliate every one; the Gentiles were not circumcised, and sub-

mitted themselves, in part, to the ordinances of the Jews, who thus saw a deference always paid to the law of their fathers, to which they were ever strongly attached².

Furnished with this decision of the council of Jerusalem, in which the Apostles declare themselves authorised by the Holy Spirit, Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch, whence they were desirous of visiting the towns where they had already preached; but a contest respecting the choice of an associate of their labours, made a breach between our two missionaries and caused a separation between them. Barnabas accompanied by Mark embarked for the Isle of Cyprus, whilst Paul with Silas, his new companion, traversed Syria and Cilicia to confirm in the faith those who had been recently converted³.

² See Acts of Apostles, chap. xv. All seems to prove that the Apostles soon repented of the weakness they had been guilty of in ceding to St. Paul, for we find he formed a separate party, who preached the Gospel in his own manner, that is to say, the Gospel of the uncircumcision.

³ It ought here to be remarked, that there exists yet a Gospel of the Nazarenes, the honour of which has been decreed to St. Barnabas, and in which Paul is roughly handled. In fact this Apostle preached, as we have shewn, besides uncircumcision, a doctrine very different from that of the Nazarenes, Ebionites, or first Christians, who, according to St. Irenæus, St. Epiphanius, and Eusebius, regarded Jesus merely as a man, the son of Joseph and Mary, and who was called the Son of God, only on account of his virtues. This may enable us to guess at the cause of Paul's quarrel with Barnabas, whose Gospel insinuates that Paul was in error in teaching that Jesus was God.

CHAPTER VI. Paul preaches in Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Greece

Upon his arrival at Lystra, St. Paul, notwithstanding the indulgence of the Council of Jerusalem, thought it good policy to circumcise a proselyte named Timothy, who was born of a Gentile father and a Jewish mother. The Acts of the Apostles inform us of the motive of this circumcision (chap. xvi. ver. 3) it being done "because of the Jews which were in those quarters."

Our two Missionaries now travelled over several provinces of Asia Minor, such as Phrygia and Galatia, and yet we find that the Holy Ghost forbade them to announce the word of God in Asia. We may indeed suppose, that in this passage, the "Holy Ghost" is only intended to indicate that our missionaries themselves perceived, that it would be dangerous for them to preach their doctrine; for in the Holy Scriptures the persons of whom it speaks are always supposed to act from divine impulse.

Paul had a vision, which persuaded him to go to Macedonia. Being arrived at Phillippi, he preached to the women with such success, that he had the happiness of converting a dealer in purple, named Lydia, who, from gratitude, invited them pressingly to lodge in her house. They were well accommodated no doubt, since devotees take great care of their directors; but our holy personages had the misfortune to perform a miracle which deranged all their affairs. Paul cast out the evil spirit from a damsel, who having a spirit of divination, brought great profit to her masters by soothsaying. The cure, or perhaps conversion, of this slave, displeased her masters, they carried their complaint to the magistrates; the people took a part against our preachers, who were beaten with rods and then sent to prison. An earthquake retrieved their affairs, they gained over the gaoler whom they converted to the faith. In the meantime the magistrates sent him an order to release our prisoners. But Paul, bearing in mind the scourging they had received, required that the magistrates should come in person and release them, asserting that they were Roman citizens: at these words the magistrates were intimidated, and came with apologies to set them free, begging them to leave their city, which request they complied with, after having been to console Lydia the devout, and the brethren, who according to appearances did not suffer them to depart empty-handed. This bad success did not discourage our missionaries who were aware doubtless, that they were inconveniences attached to their profession. They now went to Thessalonica, where Paul had the good luck to make some proselytes both among Jews and Gentiles; he converted especially, some ladies of quality; but the hardened Jews were very much irritated at his successes; they endeavoured to apprehend Paul and Silas, but not being able to find them, they dragged Jason, their host, and some of the brethren, before the magistrates, accusing them of treason, and of acknowledging another king besides Cæsar.

This uproar obliged our missionaries to decamp during the night from Thessalonica, and take the road to Berea, where they were well received by the Jews, since Paul succeeded in convincing them that the Gospel which he announced was clearly predicted in their own Scriptures: there is reason to believe that this was effected by the aid of mystical, cabalistical, and allegorical senses,

of which he so well knew the use, in finding in the Old Testament sufficient to establish whatever he was desirous of proving.

He gained in this city a great number of recruits from amongst the Greek females of quality, women, according to St. Jerome are best fitted to propagate a sect; their levity makes them easily caught by novelties; their ignorance renders them credulous; their talkativeness spreads the opinions with which they are imbued; and, in short, their obstinacy strongly attaches them to the way of thinking they have once adopted. In a word we see, that in all times the Christian religion has been under the greatest obligations to women; it is to them that innovators ought especially to address themselves when they have opinions to establish, it is by their aid that fanatics and devout impostors succeed in giving importance to their doctrine, and sow the seeds of discord in society. It appears that in the time of Paul, women had the right of speaking or of prophesying in the church, of this, they have since been deprived, and they are only allowed the privilege of bawling in public, in favour of the systems of their holy directors, whom they always believe infallible, without so much as knowing the state of the question. The Quakers are now the only sect which permits women to preach¹.

The Jews of Thessalonica proceeded to trouble our preachers, in their apostolic labours, to such a degree that Paul was under the necessity of flying. He, however, took care to leave two missionaries at Berea, to watch over the flock which he had gathered. Nevertheless these soon received orders to join him at Athens.

In this celebrated city the zeal of our Apostle kindled, he had conferences with the philosophers: desirous to learn the nature of the discoveries which this man had come to announce to them, they conducted him to the Areopagus, there Paul harangued them and spoke to them of his God, in a manner something conformable to the notions already entertained by some of the Greek philosophers of the Divinity. To confirm his discourse he cited to them a passage from the poet Aratus, who nevertheless appears to suppose, according to the doctrine of Plato, that God is the soul of the world. He inveighed against gods made of stone and metal, which did not shock the philosophers, whose ideas were more refined than those of the vulgar.

Thus far our orator was attentively heard, but the sages of Athens would no longer listen to him, when he began to speak of the last judgment, and of the resurrection, which they regarded as an absurd and ridiculous notion. Nevertheless the preaching of Paul was not totally useless at Athens, the dogma of the resurrection was no obstacle to the conversion of Dionysius, the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and some others. These were none of them shocked at this doctrine, which was so revolting to philosophers, who were accustomed to the study of nature, and who refused to adopt, without examination, such marvellous and romantic ideas.

¹ There appears some little ambiguity in this paragraph, since if the levity of women renders them so easily susceptible to the embracing new opinions, the obstinacy with which they are charged in adhering to old ones, would seem to neutralize the opposite propensity, and like the infinite attributes of Justice and Mercy in the Christians' God, they would annihilate each other. The fact is, that the ignorant of either sex, are always the most credulous, and their opinions, when imbibed, are seldom to be dignified with any other term than prejudice. Of the great influence of woman in society, no one can doubt, and it is the duty of all who think, and who desire a reformation of the present semi-barbarous state of society, to endeavour to inform and enlighten the female mind; it belongs to man to war against old systems, and errors rendered sacred by their antiquity, and perhaps to lay down some few elementary principles, founded upon a more rational basis, but so long as the infant mind is under the controul of woman, it is to her that we must look to see those principles implanted: it is by the aid of woman that the mass of mankind will (if ever it be done) be transformed from a herd of slaves, to a race of happy and intelligent beings, knowing their rights, and daring to defend them.

CHAPTER VII. Preaching of St. Paul at Corinth and Ephesus

After leaving Athens our Apostle came to Corinth. It appears that at first he had not much success, for he took to his old trade of tent-making. However, he ventured to preach in the synagogue, where the Jews were indignant at his discourse: they carried him to the tribunal of the proconsul of Achate, who had sufficient prudence to refuse to interfere in their contests. The Jews did not imitate his moderation; they ill-treated Sostenus, the chief of their synagogue, either for having allowed Paul to preach there, or for having been converted by his discourse.

Paul, after some days, departed from Corinth, he cut off his hair to fulfil a vow he had made, and which apparently obliged him to be present at Jerusalem, in order to sacrifice in the temple, according to the law. Whence we see that our Apostle had not yet totally abandoned the Jewish religion, and that he judged it good policy, occasionally to manoeuvre with the Jews. In fact we continually see him sometimes practising, and at others decrying, Judaism. From Jerusalem, Paul went to Antioch, where he remained some time, but the activity of his mind soon put him in motion. After having crossed the high provinces of Asia he came to Ephesus, where he found the secret of uniting to his sect the disciples of St. John the Baptist, whom he rebaptized, and made them acquainted with the Holy Ghost of whom they had no idea. Having now increased his party by these new recruits, Paul set about preaching in the synagogue, but finding the Jews rather untractable, he withdrew himself, and separated his disciples from them. He then commenced teaching in a separate school and performing miracles to confirm his discourses; he cured the sick, and especially those possessed, in which he succeeded much better than those of the Jews, who endeavoured from his example to attempt such cures. These miracles converted many persons.

Nevertheless, the preaching of Paul at Ephesus gave rise to an affair, which had nearly proved very troublesome. The Goldsmiths of this city derived much profit from the manufacture of little silver shrines of Diana, the patroness of the Ephesians. These artisans were much disturbed with the preaching of our apostle, who decried the gods, and might thus occasion the ruin of their trade; their clamour alarmed the people, and caused a great commotion; the public, as is generally the case, when the affair relates to religion, grew very violent, without knowing why. They comprehended, in general terms, that their religion and its patroness were attacked; and there needed nothing more to inflame their zeal. However the town-clerk of the city having explained to them that their goddess was in no danger, succeeded in calming the fury of the superstitious populace, and thus extricated our apostle from his embarrassments.

Paul, however, thought proper to quit a city, in which he had run such a risk, and again put himself in motion. Arrived at Troas he recommenced preaching, when his sermon, being a little too long, sent a young man to sleep, who fell from the third story into the street: they took him up for dead, when our Apostle having embraced him, assured them that he lived, the author of the Acts, takes this fact for a miracle, and tells us gravely that Paul raised a dead man on this occasion.

Notwithstanding this pretended miracle, which if it had been true ought to have converted the whole town, Paul went directly away, and recommenced his travels. At Miletus he took leave of the priests of all the adjacent places, after having made them a pathetic exhortation, in which he boasts of his humility and disinterestedness, and desires them to watch over the flock which he had gathered together by his preaching and indefatigable exertions.

CHAPTER VIII. The Apostle gets into embarrassments at Jerusalem, and is sent to Rome

Paul now embarked for Jerusalem; notwithstanding his own presentiments, the warnings that were given him, and the prayers of his adherents, he was obstinately determined to resort to this city, where the Jews irritated by his successes, prepared him an unpleasant reception. He was welcomed by the brethren, to whom he related the progress of the new sect, but these informed him of the bad designs of the Jews, who pretended, and not without reason, that he taught a doctrine contrary to that of Moses. To silence these rumours, and to calm the anger of the populace, they advised him to fulfil some of the Jewish ceremonies in public, and to give to these acts of religion much solemnity.

Paul consented to this counsel, but the Jews of Asia, were not thus duped, they knew what to keep to respecting the doctrine which had disgusted them; they then excited the Jews of Jerusalem, by saying, that he brought the Gentiles into the Temple. All the city was soon in an uproar, the devout people seized Paul, drew him out of the Temple, the gates of which were closed against this profaner. They were going to kill him, had not a tribune rescued him out of their hands, and shut him up in a fortress, in the midst of the clamour of an enraged populace, which demanded his death.

The Apostle ready to enter his prison, asked of the tribune permission to harangue the mob, which was granted after his Conductor was probably assured that he was not the brigand who had lately excited an insurrection in the country.

In his discourse, which he pronounced in Hebrew, Paul related to the people the history of his miraculous conversion, nearly in the manner in which it has been narrated. This recital far from softening the Jews, made them lose all patience, especially when our Apostle told them he was sent to the Gentiles. They then broke silence, crying out, "away with such a fellow from the earth, it is not fit that he should live." The tribune then shut him up in prison, and commanded that he should be scourged, in order to draw from him an acknowledgment of the crime which had excited the fury of the Jews. Paul then declared himself a Roman citizen, and represented to the centurion charged with the execution of these orders, that it was contrary to law, thus to treat a citizen without a trial. The centurion informed the tribune, who was fearful of having acted with too much precipitation. He was desirous of knowing for a certainty of what he was accused by the Jews, and the next morning, freeing him from his chains, presented him to the priests and council of the nation. Paul then began to harangue the council. He first declared that in all he had done, he had followed strictly the dictates of his conscience. At these words the High Priest gave him a box on the ear, at which Paul being irritated, instead of turning the other cheek, according to the precept of Jesus, abused the High Priest, treated him as a hypocrite, or whitened wall. But as he perceived that he had given offence by his insolence to a man respected by the

Jews, he moderated himself, and alleged that he was ignorant that it was the High Priest whom he had thus addressed in such terms; an ignorance, however, which cannot fail to excite surprise, considering that he was a man, who must have been informed respecting the place where he was, and the quality of those before whom he was speaking. Our orator was more of an adept, in managing the opinions of his auditory: aware that the council was composed of Sadducees, who denied the doctrine of the resurrection; and of Pharisees, who supported it, he knew how to profit by this circumstance, by sowing the seed of discord among his judges. In order to this he pretended that he was a Pharisee, and the son of a Pharisee, and asserted that they sought his life, because of his hope in the resurrection of the dead, This stratagem produced the desired effect, the Pharisees declared in his favour, and acknowledged his innocence, saying, "We find no evil in this man, but if a spirit or an angel hath spoken to this man, let us not fight against God." The tumult increased, and the tribune fearing that the orator would be torn in pieces, put him under a guard of soldiers, and carried him back to prison.

During the following night, Paul had a vision, in which he thought he saw the Lord, who told him to be of good courage; and prophesied that he should go to Rome to bear witness. On the other hand forty fanatical Jews, made a vow neither to eat nor drink till they had assassinated Paul. This resolution had the approbation of the princes and priests, who, according to the clerical spirit, found nothing more just than assassination in order to get rid of an enemy. The senators also consented to this treachery. But Paul's nephew having informed him of this plot, he made the tribune acquainted with it, who to secure the safety of his prisoner, and to rescue him from the fury of the Jews, conducted him under a good escort to Cæsarea, and put him under the protection of Felix, the governor of that province.

Paul, and his accusers, made their appearance before the pagan governor, who, little versed in the theological disputes of the Jews, told them that he should decide the affair when he was more fully acquainted with the particulars. However some days after, he caused the Apostle to be brought before himself, and his wife Drusilla, who was a Jewess; they heard what he had to say to them of faith in Jesus Christ. But when Paul, after having preached to them of justice, charity, and repentance, spoke of the last judgment, they were afraid, and ordered him to retire, postponing the hearing till a future time. Felix hoping to draw some money from his prisoner, often sent for him to converse with him. This conduct lasted two years, at the end of which period this Governor was replaced by Festus.

The Jews proceeded to accuse Paul before the new governor, and demanded that he should be sent to Jerusalem. The accused, well knowing that the place of this scene would be unfavourable to him, and fearing that Festus would yield to the importunities of his enemies, appealed from him to Cæsar. This appeal suspended all proceedings. However Festus having spoken of his prisoner to King Agrippa, who had the curiosity to see a man that had made so much noise in Judea. Paul appeared before this prince, justified himself from the accusations brought against him, and finished by preaching the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This doctrine appeared so strange to Festus that he did not doubt a moment of his being deranged. However as folly did not seem to him a crime worthy of death, he would instantly have acquitted him, had he not made an appeal to Cæsar. In consequence of this appeal, Paul was put on board a ship about to sail for Italy. After many difficulties he was shipwrecked on the coast of the isle of Malta, where the author of the Acts, from whom we have taken this narrative, does not fail to make him perform miracles, a necessary seasoning to legends.

Amongst other wonders which Paul wrought in the isle of Malta, he cured himself, in a very natural manner, of the bite of a viper; in fact, it appears that he applied fire to it immediately, a simple and well known remedy, but which was such a prodigy in the eyes of the poor Maltese, that they took him, who was in possession of so fine a secret, for a God¹. There was apparently nothing more wonderful in the Apostle curing the son of his host, whom he found ill of a fever and dysentery; disorders which we find yield to very simple remedies. Still this cure gained Paul great reputation, they soon brought him a great number of sick, who, according to our historian, he did not fail to cure. They rendered him great honours, furnished him with the necessary provisions for his voyage, and he embarked for Italy.

Upon his arrival at Rome, Paul was permitted to confer with the Christians, and to preach to the Jews, whom he endeavoured to convert to the faith of Christ by the law of Moses and the prophets, which he had the talent of applying wonderfully to his views: Some smitten with the mystical, cabalistical, and allegorical explications, that our Apostle gave them, adopted his opinions, while many others resisted his arguments.

Indignant against the latter, he told them that their hardness of heart had been predicted by Isaiah; he then gave them to understand, that God had formed the project of blinding them, in order to have a fair pretext for rejecting them, and transferring to the Gentiles, the light and salvation of which the Jews had made themselves unworthy, by the obstinacy in which it was the will of God that they should persist.

This conduct of the Divinity must doubtless have appeared very strange to the Jews. So the Acts inform us, that there arose from these preachings of Paul, great contests among them. They turned apparently upon predestination and grace; questions upon which Christian theologians, have not after eighteen centuries been able to come, either to an understanding or agreement.

It appears that notwithstanding the obscurity of his doctrine our Apostle succeeded in gaining proselytes to his sect; this obscurity itself, has charms for many persons, who believe that a doctrine, is so much the more marvellous or divine, as it is above the power of the understanding. He preached during two years to the Romans, without any person throwing obstacles in his way, and thus laboured to spread this religion in the capital of the world.

The Acts of the Apostles, which the church orders us to receive as of divine inspiration, informs us nothing more. St Luke to whom this work is generally attributed, has transmitted to us, neither the actions, miracles nor death of his heroes. We are reduced to seek our information thereupon from traditions, which the interests of the clergy would wish us to regard, almost as sacred as divine inspirations. According to these respectable traditions, our Apostle shed his blood for the faith in the propagation of which he had laboured; he was, say they, beheaded in the reign of Nero, and in the sixty-sixth year of the Christian era.

After what has been said, we ought naturally to regard St. Paul as the true founder of the pontifical see of Rome. Nevertheless certain traditions, useful to the Roman Pontiffs, oblige us to believe that it was St. Peter, who established his throne in the capital of the world; the popes have thought, that their interests required, that they should pass for the authorized successors of this Prince of the Apostles, to whom Christ himself according to the Gospel, granted immense rights and privileges. These traditions then make St. Peter travel to Rome, prior to St. Paul, and only regard the latter as the subaltern associate in the Apostolic labours of the former.

¹ Acts chap. xxviii. ver. 3-6.

Nevertheless some critics have ventured to doubt of the reality of St. Peter's voyage to Italy, and his foundation of the first see in the world, some authors otherwise very orthodox, without regarding the interests of the Pope, or respect for the traditions which favour them, have treated those pretensions as chimeras: as to the heretics, the sworn enemies of the authority of the Roman Pontiff, they have asserted, that the voyage of St. Peter to Rome was a fable invented by the supporters and partizans, with a design to exalt his authority. Both parties found their doubts or assertions upon these grounds. First, That the books which the church considers as inspired, make no mention of the voyage of Simon Peter, although the circumstance of going to plant the faith in the capital of the world, was sufficiently remarkable to claim a notice in preference to all the minor cities, which the Acts inform us that he visited to preach; in fact, the Holy Ghost, or St. Luke his organ, wishing to inform us in this history of the means made use of by God, to propagate the Gospel, could not without injustice, omit such a signal success, nor fail to give the honour of it to St. Peter, in case he had a claim to it.

Secondly, St. Paul who was at Rome at the same time, that Peter was supposed to have been there, never once mentions this Prince of the Apostles, in the epistles to the faithful at different places, while he speaks to them of many other disciples of much less consideration than his illustrious colleague: we ought piously to suppose that if St. Peter had really established the faith at Rome, the Apostle of the Gentiles would have been too equitable to ravish from him the glory, that must have accrued to him from so fine a conquest.

Thirdly, Our two Apostles, after the disputes, which they had at Antioch would not have been desirous of meeting, or exhibiting in the same place. St. Peter would naturally avoid a haughty colleague, who resisted him to his face, and who publicly reprov'd him in a manner sufficiently disagreeable. Besides Rome being a pagan city, naturally fell into the department of the Apostle of the Gentiles. In short according to the Acts of the Apostles, St. Paul was too hasty to agree long with an associate greater than himself. His quarrel with Barnabas, for a slight difference, proves that Paul was easily irritated.

Fourthly, St. Peter wrote his first epistle from Babylon, and not from Rome. It is true that the advocates of this voyage of Peter's, pretend that Babylon is the same city as Rome, but this is a geographical error, that without a great share of faith can never be admitted for a truth. Again, the city of Babylon in Syria, no longer existed in the time of Peter, there was then only a Babylon in Egypt; it is only there that we can suppose Peter to have written this first epistle.

Fifthly, The traditions which make St. Peter travel to Rome, are filled with fables, which make them very suspicious, such as his dispute with Simon the magician, who having raised himself into the air, by virtue of his art, fell down and broke his limbs by virtue of the Apostles prayers. We may also place in the list of fables, the apparition of Christ to Peter, when he fled from Rome, and his crucifixion with his head downwards. These facts are related neither by inspired authors, nor eye witnesses, they are founded on traditions only, that is to say, popular rumour, which many persons do not respect so much as the Pope, and the clergy seem to desire.

At the risk then of "uncovering Peter to cover Paul" we say that all these reasons, seem at least to authorize a doubt respecting the voyage of St. Peter to Rome, at any rate the Acts of the Apostles appears to insinuate that Paul was the true founder of the see of Rome. He must then be regarded as the first Pope. Besides the popes have adopted his maxims, and faithfully imitate his policy in many respects; this would easily be proved by comparing the almost constant principles of the church of Rome, with those of our Apostle, which we shall soon have occasion to examine.

CHAPTER IX. Reflections on the Life and Character of St. Paul

Such is in a few words the life of St. Paul whom we are justly entitled to regard as the principal founder of the Christian Religion. In fact it appears that without him, the ignorant and rude disciples of Jesus, would never have been able to spread their sect. In order to succeed they required a man of greater information and activity, more enterprising and enthusiastic, and possessing more dexterity than any of those, who composed the apostolic college, before it was joined by Paul. In him we see all those qualities united, which made him of all others, the most fitted to lay the foundation of a new sect. He knew how to profit by the lessons he had received from Gamaliel; from him he had acquired a profound knowledge of the Jewish Scriptures, and learnt the art of explaining them in an allegorical sense, or, in other words, the Cabala by which we may find in these books whatever we desire.

It can hardly be doubted that our Apostle, possessed much energy and ambition. We first see him persecuting the disciples of Jesus with ardour; and with the view of gaining his ends, and making court to the priests, stoop to the trade of informer and spy. Apparently he expected by these means to advance himself, but seeing the futility of these ambitious hopes, and probably despised and neglected even by those whom he had thus zealously served; he changes his batteries, threw himself upon the enemies side, and seeing the abilities of those whom he found at the head of the new sect, he felt how easily he could eclipse them, and constitute himself the chief.

There is reason to believe that these were the true motives of Paul's conversion; a mind of his stamp in declaring itself on the side of the new sect, at once satisfied its vengeance and ambition. It was then very easy for Ananias to make him listen to reason. The apostles were not slow in discovering the value of their new acquisition; they acknowledged the superiority of such a man; they foresaw the advantages the rising sect would derive from his knowledge, his active and persevering genius and intrepidity of character. Thus we see the new Apostle, from the moment that he was enrolled in the Apostolic College, perform the principal part, and throw his coadjutors completely in the shade. These contented with preaching at Jerusalem, seldom showed themselves at a distance from this city, whilst our hero, continually traversed the provinces, made spiritual conquests, and strengthened in a hundred places the cause of the disciples of Christ, now become his own. In a word Paul now becomes the soul of his sect; his enthusiasm extends itself; he braves danger when it is necessary to increase the number of his partizans; his ambition is flattered by the empire that he has gained; crosses, fatigues, imprisonments, and blows are not capable of abating his ardour; determined to succeed at any cost he sacrifices every thing to the desire that he has of extending those opinions, which give him the power of reigning over the minds of men. He knew well that no-empire upon earth is more grateful or stronger than that of opinion.

Nothing appears that ought to induce us to regard the activity, obstinate constancy, and courage of Paul as miraculous or supernatural effects. We find the same zeal, and frequently the

same intrepidity and obstinacy in all those strongly animated by ambition or any other passion. Obstacles but serve generally to irritate energetic minds, more and more, they make a merit of braving dangers; torture, and even death, cannot restrain those who are thoroughly enamoured with any object in which they have placed their happiness.

St. Paul has been held up to us as a man divested of all personal views. His humility, constancy, disinterestedness, and patience, have been advanced, as undoubted proofs of his sincerity, and pure zeal for his religion. But we say that all these things prove nothing but his violent desire for success. The preachers of an infant and oppressed sect, destitute of power, must always announce themselves with much suppleness, mildness and humility; an ambitious man must in order to gain men's hearts, effect much moderation and appear disinterested; besides he is sure of losing nothing, when he shall succeed in establishing his empire over the mind. Do devotees ever neglect their spiritual guides? In short patience and constancy are necessary in all enterprises; every man who would crown a great adventure with success, ought to avoid hastiness. Nevertheless if we turn to the history of St. Paul, we shall see that patience was not always his ruling virtue; he very often spoiled his plans by his eagerness, and especially he alienated the minds of the Jews, rather than converted them to his opinions. He would perhaps have succeeded much better with them, had he kept a better government over his impetuous temper, at which it appears his coadjutors often revolted. Devotees generally mistake that for zeal, which is but a vice in their character, and an imprudence in their conduct. The bitter reply that Paul made to the High Priest, proves that our Apostle was not excessively enduring, and forgot, at least, on some occasions his Christian patience.

CHAPTER X. Of the Enthusiasm of St. Paul

It appears certain that this apostle was filled with enthusiasm and zeal. It will perhaps be asked whether we have a right to regard him as an impostor? a thousand examples prove to us, that nothing is more common, than to witness enthusiasm, zeal and imposture united in the same person. The most sincere enthusiast is generally a man whose passions are turbulent, and capable of blinding him; he takes his passions for divine impulses, he deludes himself, and if we may be allowed the expression, gets intoxicated with his own wine. A man who at first engages in a particular cause from motives of interest, or ambition, very frequently finishes by attaching himself to it with sincerity and with strength proportioned to the sacrifices he may have made for it. If he succeed in persuading himself, that the cause of his passions is the cause of God, he will make no scruple of supporting it by all sorts of means, he will sometimes allow the use of artifice, deceit, and oblique ways of maintaining the opinions of which he happens to be convinced. It is thus we daily see very zealous devotees, employ deception, fraud, and sometimes crime, in support of the interests of religion, i. e. of the cause they have embraced.

Thus although in the first instance the desire of being revenged on the priests, or ambitious views, may have determined St. Paul to join the sect of Christians, he might have been able by degrees to attach himself strongly to it, to persuade himself that it was preferable to the religion of the Jews, and to employ objectionable means, in order to make it succeed in the world.

The examination that now remains for us to make of some features in the conduct of our apostle, and of some passages in the writings which are attributed to him, will serve better than any reasoning to determine the judgment, we ought to come to respecting this person. Let us then hear what he has to say for himself. This analysis will shew us whether Paul was so sincere, disinterested, humble, mild, and upright as his partizans, maintain him to have been.

St. Paul in speaking of himself says: "That he knew a man who was caught up into the third heaven, and that there he heard unspeakable words, which it was not lawful for man to utter¹." It appears in the first place that no one but a man of a very heated imagination could with sincerity pretend to have been caught up into the third Heaven; and no one but an impostor, could assert such a fact without being persuaded of it. In the second place we may ask of what use could it be to mankind that St. Paul should hear in the third heaven, unspeakable words, that is to say, such as it was unlawful for man to utter? What should we think of a man who should come and assure us, that he possessed a secret most important to our happiness, but yet one which he was not permitted to divulge? Thus the voyage of St. Paul is either a chimera engendered by a sickly brain, or a fable, contrived by a cheat, who sought to make himself respected by boasting of the peculiar favours of the almighty. This voyage then was perfectly useless, since it was not permitted him who made it to relate that which he learnt from it. In short there is malice in St. Paul thus irritating the curiosity of his hearers and refusing to satisfy it. Under whatever point

¹ 2 Corinthians, chap. xii. ver. 2, 3, 4.

of view then we behold this history or tale of Paul's ravishment into the third heaven, it can be of no utility to us, and reflects but little honour upon himself.

CHAPTER XI. Of the Disinterestedness of St. Paul

In narrowly examining into the conduct of our Apostle, we shall have much difficulty in discovering that disinterestedness with which his partizans are so desirous of investing him. We have already exposed the natural motives which may have contributed to his conversion. If it be true as the Acts of the Apostles, adopted by the Ebionites or Nazarenes, asserts, that St. Paul flattered himself with the idea of marrying the high priest's daughter, and failed in the project, the disappointment might to a man of his passionate and hasty temper, be a motive sufficient to determine him to change sides, and from being as we have shewn him to have been the spy and satellite of the priests, basely seeking to gain their good will, by becoming the agent in their furies against the disciples of Jesus; to declare himself in favour of those, who were their greatest enemies. It was perhaps the ill success of Paul's amours, that determined him to a life of celibacy, and to boast of it as meritorious, whilst according to the Jewish law, nothing was held in less repute than this state. This holy man would doubtless transform into a virtue, a conduct, which in him was nothing but chagrin and ill temper. He asserts that it is good for men to abstain from women; consequently our clergy have regarded celibacy as a virtue: they have fancied themselves obliged to imitate the great St. Paul even in his resentments against the sex. They have flattered themselves with the idea of being able to resist like him the temptations of the flesh, which often torments them; if they have indulgently permitted marriage to the profane, it is because Paul has said, it is better to marry than to burn. It is notwithstanding probable that the conversion of St. Paul was occasioned by other motives than the anecdote related by the Acts of the Ebionites, which appears exposed to many objections. In fact, according to these Acts, Paul was a pagan born, was made a proselyte, and consequently he could not, without having been guilty of great folly, pretend to the daughter of a high priest, whose dignity was so eminent amongst the Jews. On the other hand according to the writings adopted by the Christians of our time, St. Paul was of the tribe of Benjamin, and would not have been permitted to marry the daughter of a high priest, who must necessarily have been of the tribe of Levi. Again Paul was a mechanic, a tent-maker, a situation which must have deprived him of all hope of an alliance so illustrious as that of a sovereign Pontiff. Thus unless we suppose that love had totally blinded our hero, to the obstacles which naturally opposed themselves to his desires, there is reason to believe that his conversion, or change of party, originated from other motives, than the chagrin of seeing his amours frustrated. There is reason to believe that Paul being of a very unquiet genius, was tired of his trade: desirous of trying his fortune, and living without work, he became the spy of the priests and the informer against the Christians. Dissatisfied with the priests, who perhaps had not rewarded him to the extent of his expectations, he joined the new sect, which assisted by his talents promised good success, or even a probability that he might become the head; at least he might fairly calculate on an easy and honourable subsistence without being obliged to make tents, In fact he saw, that the apostles, who were vulgar men much inferior to himself, lived very

well at the expence of the new converts, who eagerly brought their wealth and laid it at the apostles feet, consequently Paul was sensible, how easy it was for him to live in the same way, and provide himself a very comfortable birth, in a sect, in which he felt himself capable of playing a very important part. His ambition must have been more gratified with occupying one of the first posts, even amongst beggars, than of cringing in an infamous and dishonourable capacity, under avaricious, haughty and disdainful priests. Indeed Paul himself tells us that he had relations of considerable note among the apostles, who having embraced the faith before him, might have laboured with success for the conversion of a man so disposed.¹

The persecutions that he had excited against the disciples could not have put any very serious obstacles in the way of his admission into the apostolic college: nothing was required but to explain and agree upon facts. The chiefs of the sect were very much flattered at seeing the conquest made by their party of an inconvenient adversary, who came of his own accord, and offered his services. His conversion, effected by a miracle, did honour to his mission, and showed the vulgar the protection of heaven, which changed the heart of the most bitter enemy of the Christians. As Paul was not ignorant that in this sect great value was set upon miracles, visions and revelations, he thought this was the most favourable door by which he could enter, and render himself acceptable to the Apostles; they received him with open arms well assured of the sincerity of a man who after having made such an uproar could not recede without making himself equally odious both to Jews and Christians. St. Paul amongst other talents which rendered him a fit person to propagate the new religion, understood, according to appearances, Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, whilst in spite of the gift of tongues, we do not find, that the other apostles possessed these advantages. In fact we see them remain at Jerusalem, preaching to the Jews only, whilst the new apostle extended his spiritual conquests, into the provinces of Asia and Greece, where it appears that without him the Gospel would not have been preached so soon.

Once connected with the new sect, Paul had doubtless a great interest in spreading it, in strengthening his party, and making converts in order to gain support, and have the pleasure of reigning over a great number of devotees. Thus, under every point of view, we see that our Apostle, whether in his conversion, or in his preaching, was every thing but negligent of his interest. All missionaries have necessarily ambition; they propose to themselves the pleasure of governing minds, and every thing proves that Paul was not exempt from a passion inherent in all founders of sects. And further having once established his ecclesiastical power, we often see him taking care of his temporal interests, and making his flock feel how just it is that the priest should live by the altar; in a word to occupy himself with the emoluments of his preaching. "Let him," says he, "that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things."² He speaks in the same tone to the Thessalonians (chap. v. ver. 12.) He likewise recommends them an abundant charity.

It remains to be observed, St. Paul is not like his successors ungrateful for the benefits which he has received. He thanks the Philippians for having twice assisted him in his need. It appears that in his time the Apostles did not possess the divine right that men had the goodness to give them: but the clergy have since asserted that they hold from God alone, that which they obtained from the generosity of princes and people, which evidently frees them from the necessity of showing gratitude to any one.

¹ Epis. to Romans, chap. xvi. verse 7.

² Epis. to Galatians, chap. vi. ver. 6.

CHAPTER XII. Of the imperious Tone and political Views of St. Paul

It appears by the writings attributed to Paul himself that the empire which he exercised over the members whom he had added to his sect, was not one of mildness. In proof of this, may be cited the manner in which this spiritual despot speaks to the faithful of Corinth. "Moreover (says he) I call God for a record upon my soul, that to spare you, I came not as yet into Corinth."¹ Again, "For to this end also did I write, that I might know the proof of you, whether ye be obedient in all things²". He threatens the Corinthians, and says to them, "if I come again I will not spare." Again he justifies the tone in which he talks, by saying, "Therefore I write these things being absent, lest being present I should use sharpness, according to the power which the Lord hath given me to edification, and not to destruction."³ It is probably by virtue of this right of chastising, here assumed by St. Paul, that the Pontiffs and Priests of the Christians have since arrogated to themselves an unlimited spiritual power over, the thoughts of their subjects. Their empire extended itself by degrees over their persons; Christian priests, exceeding the Apostle to whom the Lord had given this power to edify, availed themselves of it to destroy those whom they found not sufficiently submissive to their decisions. If St. Paul did not exercise over his sheep a power so extensive, it is doubtless because he had not, like our pastors, princes, magistrates and soldiers under his orders, capable of executing his holy will: with his imperious temper we may justly conclude that he would have conducted himself much in the same manner as some fathers of the church, the Pontiffs of Rome, or the Holy Inquisition.

We see also that the Apostle, not satisfied with being sole judge in spiritual affairs, was desirous of the power of deciding in civil suits. "Dare any of you having a matter against another go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints? Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world?⁴" This passage evidently proves that the Apostle in the depth of his policy had already formed the design of making the saints, i. e. the clergy, masters of the fortunes as well as the consciences of the faithful. In fact, he adds, know ye not that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life? We cannot sufficiently admire the moderation of the Christian clergy, in not having rigorously acted up to the letter of this decisive text, which formally gives them the right of judging in all temporal affairs, or the concerns of this life. Indeed it appears according to this passage, that Christians in their transactions, ought to have no other judges, or even sovereigns, than the church. It is from these maxims, that our priests have become censors, or a kind of magistrates, who interfere with every thing, and set themselves up for the judges of the legitimacy of civil acts, of births and marriages, of which they have made themselves masters; in a few words, they seize upon man the moment he is born, and regulate all his motions

¹ 2 Corinthians, chap. i. ver. 23.

² 2 Corinthians, chap. ii. ver. 9.

³ 2 Corinthians, chap. xiii. ver. 2. and 10.

⁴ 1 Corinthians, chap. vi. ver. 1. and 2.

until his death. It is from these pretences, that the popes have impudently arrogated the power of disposing of crowns, of exciting insurrections and wars, and of deciding upon the rights of sovereigns and people.

It is by no means surprising that the heads of the Christian church, have at all times held up St. Paul, as a man divinely inspired; have for a distinction entitled him, the Apostle, have inculcated for his writings the most profound veneration, and have caused them to be considered, as the oracles of the Holy Ghost. This Apostle was evidently the architect of the church. We may consider him especially as the founder of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. It is to him that are owing the prerogatives, privileges, divine rights and pretences of the clergy. St. Paul established bishops, assigned them their rights, and in his writings laid the foundations of that spiritual power, which has since become so formidable to temporal authority. How could the inventor of so many useful things, fail to be regarded as the organ of the divinity.

Nevertheless, if we read the gospels with the slightest attention, we shall find that Jesus has no where spoken of this hierarchy or power, nor of the prerogatives of the clergy; on the contrary, we see him' incessantly preaching to his apostles, equality, humility and poverty. But in that as in many other instances, our Apostle thought himself at liberty to correct the institutions of Christ, who on all occasions shewed himself unfavourable to priests. These changes effected by Paul are sufficient to make us acquainted with his secret policy. He endeavoured apparently to make himself the spiritual and temporal head of the churches, which he had by his labours, founded among the Gentiles, with whom, as we have shewn, he had more success than amongst the Jews. It was to gain them over that he became all things to all men, that he dispensed them, as we have said, from the most essential ordinances of the Mosaic law. In short he had the secret of insinuating himself, into the minds of idolators, whom he sometimes took by surprize accommodating himself to their capacities, and giving them as he himself has said, sometimes milk, and at others, solid food. As we have already sufficiently shewn, Paul after his successes with the Gentiles, gave himself little trouble respecting the converted Jews, or with his elder brethren in the apostle-ship; and openly declared himself against the Mosaic law. As we have seen he went himself to Jerusalem, to solicit a decree, to dispense the Gentiles from the rite of circumcision; this he had much at heart, feeling how necessary this indulgence was, in order to secure his new subjects. Thus it was he who enlarged the breach, though small in its origin, which separated the Jews from the Christians, or Nazarenes. This conduct naturally displeased the rest of the apostles, who appeared, even after the council, always attached to the Jewish ordinances, but who on this occasion, found themselves compelled to cede to Paul, or at least to temporize with a man who had gained an ascendancy over them.

CHAPTER XIII. Of the Humility, of St. Paul

With the ability and ambitious conduct which we have just remarked in St. Paul it is difficult to conceive that humility could have been his ruling passion. Perusing his writings, we shall without much difficulty discover that when he humbles himself it is generally with a view of exalting himself in the eyes of his adherents; he does not fail to boast of the penalties, sufferings, and labours that he has submitted to for love of them, it is upon this, that he founds his claims to their respect and gratitude. "Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God:" further on he adds, "for I think that God hath set forth us, the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men."

St. Paul then reproaches the Corinthians, with their ease, their luxury, and their pretences, and compares their happy situation with his own. "We are, (says he to them,) fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ: we are weak, but ye are strong; ye are honourable, but we are despised. Even unto this present hour we both hunger and thirst, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling place, and labour, working with our own hands." He then enumerates the evils he has suffered, and adds "I write not these things to shame you, but as my beloved sons to warn you." Of what? He explains himself, and says, "For though you have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel." Our humble missionary sends them his lieutenant, Timothy, to bring them back to their duty, i. e. to the obedience they owed to their spiritual father, he threatens them himself, and mildly demands of them, "What will ye? Shall I come unto you with a rod, or in love, and in the spirit of meekness?"

In all this remarkable tirade there are no traces of that profound humility, for which credit has been given to Paul: on the contrary, all discovers a domineering spirit, and a desire of exclusive power over the faithful whom he had converted. It is generally the proudest men who complain the most bitterly of being despised and treated with contempt; and, amongst devotees, Pride knows how to cover appearances with the garb of humility. However, our Apostle does not give himself the trouble to mask his self-love: in fact, when he compares himself to the rest of the Apostles, he makes us understand, that though he terms himself the last, he has a right to be considered as the first. He says, "For I suppose I was not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles." It seems that the Corinthians were shocked with the harshness of his tone; for he adds, "but though I be rude in speech, yet not in knowledge: but we have been thoroughly made manifest among you in all things." Then feeling that they might be disgusted with these imprudent self commendations, he says, "Seeing that many glory after the flesh, I will glory also."

It is easy to see that our Evangelical Doctors propose to themselves Paul's humility as a model for their own. It is doubtless, in imitation of this great Saint, that the Pope calls himself the Servant of the Servants of God, which does not, however, prevent him from making those who refuse to acknowledge his unlimited power, and blindly subscribe to his infallible decisions, feel

his pastoral rod; but when the rulers of the Church make use of this rod, it is only to shew their great zeal for the interests of the Lord.

CHAPTER XIV. Of the Zeal of St. Paul; Reflections on this Christian Virtue

That passion which in common life is termed, anger, fury, vengeance or delirium, becomes zeal as soon as its object is religion, or the cause of God. It is a maxim among Christian devotees, that we cannot love God too much, consequently we cannot sin in excess of zeal. According to these principles, our doctors in their quarrels, injure, defame, calumniate, and asperse, and when they have the power, persecute and exterminate each other. Each sect, firmly persuaded that it is in the right, and that its peculiar way of thinking is the only one that God can approve, thinks itself justified in destroying the opinions of its adversaries, which displeasing to itself, must consequently displease the divinity. Thus in attentively examining the thing, we find that religious zeal is nothing but anger, excited in a bigot by opinions adverse to his own, or those of the party he has espoused. In a word, zeal is the gall which contradiction secretes in the souls of bigots. There can be no doubt, but that St. Paul has left a model of this sort, which our evangelical doctors, have in all times faithfully copied. If this great Apostle did not go to the extent of persecuting those who resisted his arguments, or refused blindly to submit to his supreme decisions, it is because he was not sufficiently strong; otherwise judging from the warmth of his temperament we may reasonably presume, that he would have been easily carried to extremities, well calculated to justify the holy passion to which the heads of the church have since given themselves up on all occasions, when they have had sufficient power to give a lustre to their zeal.

In fact we find, that Paul's self love, did not suffer contradiction with too much patience. He delivers over to Satan those who refuse to obey him, he pretended that any other Gospel, than his own, was abominable. "I marvel that you are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel." He pretends and affirms that he alone taught the true doctrine, and that all others are impostors, false prophets, and disturbers; we are obliged to believe on his own word that he possesses infallibility.

He goes so far as to say in the heat of his self-love "But though we, or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you, than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you, than that ye have received, let him be accursed."¹ This language might well appear insolent, presumptuous, and even impious to those who have not faith, nevertheless it is that which is invariably held by the chiefs of every sect; we see them, upon their own authority, continually anathematizing, excommunicating, damning and delivering over to the devil, whoever has the temerity to understand the Gospel in any other way but their own. Every doctor like Paul, declares himself and even believes himself to be infallible; nothing in the world, (not even the angels of heaven) could make him renounce opinions which his self-love, his obstinacy, and his vanity, cause him to behold as the only true.

¹ Epistle to Gal. Chap. i. ver. 8 and 9.

The history of Paul, however furnishes us with an embarrassing circumstance. Ardent in dispute and obstinately attached to his own ideas, we see this infallible Apostle boasted of having resisted Cephas, i.e. Peter, to his face, who nevertheless appears to have had titles to infallibility, still better established than those of our Apostle; in fact if Paul, in order to prove his own infallibility, supports it by his visions, inspirations, revelations, and miracles: St. Peter might in favour of his own, oppose to him a great number of visions, dreams, and prodigies equally authentic with those of his brother. If Paul founded the divinity of his mission, and the truth of his particular way of thinking on his own testimony, could not St. Peter cite, in support of his authority, the testimony of Jesus Christ, who had declared him the chief of the apostles, who had established him, as the first shepherd of his flock, and the rock on which, he would found his church? Is it not upon this authentic evidence, that the Pope, who stiles himself the successor of Peter, founds his infallibility, acknowledged and maintained by the greater part of the Roman Catholic Clergy? There is then reason to be astonished that Paul, with titles not so well established, should have dared to resist Peter to his face, or that he should have boasted of such resistance; and it is not less surprising that the latter should have ceded to his junior in the apostleship, having such powerful arguments to support his claim to infallibility.

All may however be explained by the supposition that upon this occasion St. Paul showed himself more headstrong than St. Peter, who for the sake of peace, yielded to the eagerness of his adversary, and would not support his own infallibility at the risk of exciting a schism in the rising sect. We have seen in our time pious Jansenists avail themselves of St. Paul's example, to resist to the face the infallible decisions of the Roman Pontiff; but he, less moderate than his predecessor St. Peter, would not cede, but remained obstinate in maintaining his irrefragable authority, and by this means produced and fomented divisions, which the determined zeal displayed by both parties, has rendered very dangerous. The successor of St. Peter anathematizes, and finding himself the strongest, persecutes the imitators of St. Paul, for daring to resist him: these of course strongly attached to their principles which they deem infallible, are obstinate in their resistance, detest the opinions of their tyrants, and in spite of charity, very cordially damn those who do not think like themselves, whilst these last from attachment to the infallibility of the Pope, whom they have on their side, believe themselves compelled, in conscience, to make their adversaries submit to the most inhuman and unreasonable treatment.

Such are the salutary effects which zeal has produced in the Church of Jesus Christ, from the first preaching of the gospel to the present day. The zeal of St. Paul not contented with exercising itself against his brethren the apostles, shewed itself strongly in all situations. We see him excite trouble and clamour in whatever cities he happened to be. We generally term a man a public disturber, who troubles the peace of his neighbours; but, in religion, a saint is a man who dares to preach his own opinions, as those of God himself, at the risk of exciting the most disastrous revolutions in society. His self-love becomes legitimate as soon as its object is religion; proves to him in the most convincing manner that he is always right; that his way of thinking is necessary to salvation, and that all considerations ought to give way to such an important object. If religious zeal is able one day to procure advantages in the other world; it is at least very evident that it causes many misfortunes here below. In the eyes of reason it is always equally dangerous, even when it is the fruit of the most sincere devotion. If the impostor, the ambitious man and the hypocrite, avail themselves of it as a cloak to cover all crimes, the sincere bigot thinks that zeal justifies the greatest excesses, and often makes a merit, and even a duty, of detesting his fellows and troubling society.

It is in fact difficult to reconcile zeal with the spirit of union, concord, and peace, that Christianity recommends, or with that charity which St. Paul places above all virtues, and without which, he assures us that all the others are useless. But did this Apostle himself possess much charity, when not satisfied with carrying trouble into every place where he preached, he inveighed against those whom he found not disposed to believe²?

It is doubtless nothing but a lively faith, which can reconcile the violent conduct of this great Apostle, with the charity which he incessantly recommends. It appears at least difficult to have a sincere regard for men whom zeal obliges us to hate, either as our own enemies, or as the enemies of God. The subtle theology of the Christians, can alone reconcile these incompatible dispositions.

It is only the ministers of the Church, who have the talent of proving, that without a violation of Christian charity, it is lawful to harass, persecute, and destroy ones neighbours. They can in fact clearly show that we may burn the body of a man, out of tenderness for his soul. They think they have a right to excommunicate a man, or anathematize him, that is to say, exclude him for ever from spiritual grace, to put him in short into the road to damnation, to deliver him to Satan, for the destruction of the flesh, in order to save him, according to the spirit. This conduct is not the least inconceivable mystery of the Christian religion; faith is doubtless necessary to find it either charitable or intelligible. How can we conceive, for example, that the desire of saving the soul of an heretic, or an impious man, can determine the inquisition or Christian magistrates to consign him to the flames, even while he persists in those opinions, which they suppose must plunge him into hell?

² Epistle to Tim. Chap. i. ver. 20.

CHAPTER XV. Of the Deceptions or Apostacy of St. Paul

By the aid of faith we never find any thing to condemn in the conduct of those, whom we have been accustomed to regard as saints; their obstinacy, seditious spirit, pride, even their ferocity, are justified, by saying that they are animated with a holy zeal. In a word, a saint may violate with impunity, the most sacred rules of morality, without his bigoted admirers permitting themselves to criticise his conduct. Saints have always been in the habit of terming those chastisements, which they have drawn upon themselves (oftentimes justly) by their unruly passions or indiscreet zeal, persecution. Those whom a devout phrensy excites to tumult and disorder are honoured as confessors and martyrs, and we find the Jews and Pagans were the most unjust and cruel of men, for having treated the Christians, whom they could not consider but as disturbers of the public peace, in the same manner as the Christians now treat the Jews, heretics, and infidels. Bigots, accustom themselves to regard their saints as irreproachable characters, or if they cannot justify their conduct, they say that God has permitted them to sin, to humiliate them, in order that he might have an opportunity of pardoning them. It is thus that every good Christian regards a brigand in revolt against his legitimate sovereign, an usurper, a monster of cruelty, an infamous adulterer, an assassin, in a word, a David, as a great saint; or even by excellence, as the man after God's own heart! Faith in the mind of a bigot, is able to reverse, even the most simple rules of morality and virtue. Religion encourages the most perverse men to give themselves up to the blackest crimes, the most shameful vices, and the most shocking irregularities, by setting before them the examples of scoundrels, who were nevertheless the friends of God.

It cannot be pretended that St. Paul of whom we are now speaking, was guilty of excesses, similar to those committed by the king of the Jews, whose whole history is a series of horrors: but without faith it is difficult to consider our Apostle as an irreproachable character; though the historian, whoever he be, to whom we are indebted for the Acts of the Apostles, has designed to hold him up as a model of virtue, we find that by a singular oversight he did not seem aware, that he made him tell an untruth in public, and in the most solemn manner in presence of the Sanhedrim or great council of the Jews. In fact as we have already remarked, perceiving that his audience was composed of Sadducees and Pharisees, with the view of dividing them and gaining friends, Paul cried out that he was a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee, and that they sought to kill him, because of his hope in the resurrection.

In this assertion we may detect two deceptions. In the first place Paul was not a Pharisee, at the moment he spoke he was a Christian, he was an Apostle, he preached Jesus Christ, he laboured effectually to make proselytes to his sect, he had disgusted the Jews in announcing to them a new law, contrary to that of Moses, he had procured in the council at Jerusalem the abolition of the practice of circumcision so strictly ordained by their law. In a word he preached Christianity and not Judaism in the same moment that he declared himself a Pharisee. On this occasion his conduct was in fact that of an apostate, at least it cannot be denied, that he conducted himself as

a coward, who did not care to acknowledge his real belief in the presence of the council, and who had recourse to an artifice to outwit his Judges. In fact the conduct of Paul on this occasion has no resemblance to that of a great number of martyrs, who freely acknowledge themselves Christians at the risk of their lives, and boldly confessed Jesus Christ, in the presence of their persecutors and executioners. The presence of the High Priest and council so much imposed on St. Paul, that he declared himself a Pharisee; fear troubled his memory to such a degree, that he forgot he had just acknowledged himself a Christian, and missionary of Jesus to the Gentiles in the presence of the people collected before the gate of the fortress, who indignant at his discourse, cried out, "away with such a fellow from the earth for it is not fit that he should live." Nothing then but theological subtilty, can clear Paul from deception, apostacy, and cowardice on this occasion.

In the second place it was not true, that it was because of the hope of another life, and of the resurrection of the dead, that Paul was persecuted by the Jews. It was for having preached a new doctrine, contrary to the law of Moses; this great legislator has in no part taught us what we ought to believe concerning the resurrection of the dead or of another life. The Jews without ceasing to be Jews, embraced respecting it whatever opinion they pleased, the Sadducees rejected it without however being on that account, excluded from the synagogue, and without ceasing to observe the Judaic law; the Pharisee admitted it without its appearing to cause a schism between them, and those who did not think, as they did. It is true that Paul had preached the resurrection, but it was that of Jesus, on which he endeavoured to establish a new sect very different from the Jewish religion. Thus the words of St. Paul were merely a subterfuge unworthy of a man, whom grace ought to have endued with sufficient courage to maintain before the council, at the peril of his liberty and his life, the same sentiments that he had taught the people and preached in all those places where he had planted the faith. It was then for having preached Christianity, and for having (in spite even of his brethren the apostles) desired in favour of the Gentiles the abolition of the Jewish customs, that Paul was persecuted, the priests were doubtless irritated against a man who sought to abrogate a law and a priesthood which a divine revelation had so many times taught them was to endure eternally, whilst the authors of the Epistle to the Hebrews formerly assures us that they have been set aside by the Gospel.

CHAPTER XVI. St. Paul's Hypocrisy

We cannot avoid perceiving still more of the insincerity and profound hypocrisy of Paul's conduct at Jerusalem. After having preached in a great number of towns in Asia and Greece, a doctrine revolting to the feelings of the Jews, and which every where caused disturbances amongst them, after having in favour of the Gentiles abolished circumcision so particularly ordained by the law of Moses, and deemed so essential to the proselytes of the gate; we see this great Apostle, by the advice of his brethren, submit himself, during seven days, to the Jewish ceremonies; purify himself with affectation. "Then Paul took the men, and the next day purifying himself with them, entered into the temple, to signify the accomplishing of the days of purification, until that an offering should be offered for every one of them¹." But the Jews of Asia, who knew the real sentiments of our missionary, from having heard him preach when amongst them, were not the dupes of his hypocrisy: they excited the people "crying out, men of Israel, help: this is the man that teacheth all men every where against the people, and the laws of this place; and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy placet."² These were the true charges of the Jews against Paul, and without denying what we find in the Acts of the Apostles, we must acknowledge, that they were well founded.

What should we say in the present day of a bishop, who, whilst pretending to be a Christian, should go for a period of seven days into a synagogue in London or Amsterdam, to fulfil Jewish ceremonies in the sight of the public? We should not fail to regard him as an apostate, or a knave, who had sinister intentions at any rate, the most favourable construction, we would put upon his motives, would be to suppose him a fool. We are however to admire this conduct in Paul, he pretends to justify himself by the necessity of becoming all things to all men. It is thus we see that hypocrisy, falsehood, and imposture, are legitimate means, by which to advance the cause of God and gain souls.

Nevertheless there is every reason to think that St. Paul in acting in such a singular manner, had his own interest and safety, more at heart than the cause of the divinity. His conduct has been faithfully copied by a great number of Christian missionaries, and especially by the Jesuits, whom their adversaries often reproach with having frequently assimilated the worship of Jesus with that of those idolatrous people, whom they were endeavouring to convert.

¹ Acts of Apostles, chap. xxi. ver. 6.

² Acts of Apostles, chap. xxi. ver. 28.

CHAPTER XVII. St. Paul accused of Perjury, or the Author of the Acts of the Apostles, convicted of Falsehood.

Not contented with pursuing this oblique or hypocritical conduct, we again see, our great Apostle, evidently, wilfully guilty of perjury, or a false oath. To convince ourselves of this we have only to read the commencement of his Epistle to the Galatians; to prove to them, that the gospel which he announced to them; was divinely inspired, he says "But certify to you brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me, is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." Further on he proves what he advances by saying, "But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood; neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me but I went into Arabia, and returned again into Damascus. Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days. But other of the apostles, saw I none, save James the Lord's brother. Now the things which I write unto you behold before God I lie not¹." But if Paul did not lie, in what he related to the Galatians, it is clear that the author of the Acts of the Apostles, whom the Christian church regards as an inspired writer equally with St. Paul, has lied. In fact in the ninth chapter of the Acts, it is said that Paul after his conversion, and after having recovered his sight remained some days with the disciples who were at Damascus; which proves that he was instructed by men, or that he took counsel of flesh and blood. Believing himself sufficiently fortified in his theology, by Ananias or others, he began to preach Christ in the synagogue, at which conduct the Jews were so shocked that they sought to take away his life: but Saul escaped from their fury by means of a basket, and without mention made of his journey to Arabia, he directly returns to Jerusalem, where the disciples were in the first instance fearful of him, but Barnabas, encouraged them, and presented him to the apostles, at the same time relating to them his miraculous conversion, and his courageous preaching at Damascus. In consequence it is said that Paul was added to the number of the faithful. (Acts ix).

It is easy to see, how little this recital of the inspired historian of the Acts, agrees with that of the inspired Apostle, who wrote to the Galatians, and confirmed his narration by an oath. Besides the journey of St. Paul to Arabia upon leaving Damascus, and which preceded his arrival at Jerusalem by three years, becomes very improbable, as well as his stay in this country. In fact the disciples at Jerusalem must have been in habits of correspondence with those of Damascus, consequently they would thus have heard of an event so interesting to their sect, as the conversion of St. Paul and the pains he took to propagate their doctrines; thus the presence of our Apostle would not have created any uneasiness, and there could have been no need of Barnabas becoming his surety.

¹ This passage proves very forcibly that Paul preached a different gospel from that of the other apostles, i. e. from the Ebionites or Nazarenes.

It appears then that the new convert upon leaving Damascus went directly to Jerusalem, that he had there an opportunity of conversing with the apostles, and that his theology was not intuitive.

But even supposing that the journey and sojourn of three years in Arabia, really took place, it would be no less certain that Paul took a false oath to the Galatians, or that the author of the Acts is deceived. In fact St. Paul writes that at the end of three years he returned to Jerusalem to visit Peter, and that he remained fifteen days with him without seeing any other of the apostles. This is quite at variance with the author of the Acts, who informs us that Paul being come to Jerusalem, sought to join himself to the disciples, who were afraid of him, not knowing that he was a disciple. Our Saint contradicts all this by a different tale which he confirms by an oath.

Moreover by this oath Paul himself contradicts the discourse which the author of the Acts, puts into his mouth in the presence of King Agrippa, of Queen Berenice, and the governor Festus².

In relating to them his conversion, he says to them, Whereupon, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision; but shewed first unto them at Damascus and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judea, and then to the Gentiles that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance. Thus according to the author of the Acts, St. Paul himself acknowledges that he first preached at Damascus, then at Jerusalem before addressing himself to the Gentiles.

If he had preached during a period of three years in Arabia, he would have spoken of the circumstance, of which no mention is made in all the Acts of the Apostles, whilst we find there the most minute details of the continual journeyings.

We shall just remark here a visible contradiction in the Acts of the Apostles; The author of this work in relating the miraculous conversion of St. Paul, says that those who accompanied him, were speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no man³. However the same author, forgetting himself makes Paul say in his discourse to the Jews, "And they that were with me saw indeed the light and were afraid, but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me⁴".

It belongs to the impartial reader to judge what degree of confidence is due to writers who are so often at variance. In the first instance Paul solemnly attests by an oath, the truth of a fact, not only omitted, but even formally contradicted by St. Luke, his historian and disciple. In the second instance the historian contradicts himself. This ought at least to shake the implicit faith, that so many persons put in works which possess neither the consistence nor harmony required in ordinary writers. As to our doctors they tell us their ways of saving the honour of these two inspired ones; whom they have much interest in washing from so grave an accusation, and such a taint upon the Christian religion.

² Acts, xxvi. ver. 29.

³ Acts, ix. ver. 7.

⁴ Acts, xxii. ver. 9.

CHAPTER XVIII. Examination of St. Paul's Miracles

Though St. Paul as we have just seen, has himself taken care to shake the credit of the author of the Acts of the Apostles, it is nevertheless on the word of this writer that Christians think themselves obliged to believe in the miracles of our great Apostle. In fact, like all those who have endeavoured to establish new sects, our preacher could not dispense with performing prodigies: this is the most certain method of exciting the admiration of the vulgar. Incapable of reasoning, of judging of the soundness of a doctrine, and frequently unable in the least to comprehend it, miracles always become the most powerful of arguments; they are indubitable proofs that he who works them is the favourite of the divinity, that consequently he cannot be in the wrong, nor capable of a wish to deceive.

Miracles were more especially necessary amongst the Jews; they demanded signs from all those who spoke to them in the name of the Lord, and there was little difficulty in working them, before an ignorant and credulous people, ready to receive as such every thing that was shewn to them. In spite of a disposition so favourable to miracle-mongers, we do not find that those of Jesus himself and afterwards of his apostles, produced on the Jews those effects which we have a right to expect from them. We find that at the time they were performed they convinced nobody and drew those who worked them, into difficult situations. It was not until a long time had elapsed that these prodigies produced their effects, and by a miracle that we can never cease to admire, we find, that these prodigies, which were discarded by those who saw them, were most firmly believed by those who did not see them, and are now ranked amongst the strongest evidences of the divinity of the Christian religion. There are only some reasoners who persist in judging of these ancient miracles in the same manner as the contemporaries who did not see them, or who, if they did see them, regarded them as so many instances of deception and slight of hand, incapable of imposing on them. It is only the simplicity, of faith, that is to say, an implicit confidence in the assertions of our guides, which can make us see miracles, or cause us to believe in those we have not seen. But this simple faith is the effect of an especial grace that God grants only to those who are poor in spirit, and harshly refuses to those who think and reason. As soon as we want confidence in the operators, we see no more miracles, or at least we doubt of those that are shewn to us.

It does not appear that St. Paul performed miracles at Jerusalem after his conversion; this city was not in his department: it belonged to St. Peter and the other Jewish apostles, who, according to the Acts, did not cease to work miracles there. Our Apostle of the uncircumcised, or of the district in which the Gentiles were converted, having quitted his brethren, commenced his course of miracles at Paphos. He was upon the point of converting Sergius, proconsul of the province, had not a cursed sorcerer of a Jew, named Barjesus, and surnamed Elymas, i.e. magician, endeavoured to prevent the magistrate from believing in Jesus Christ. Indignant at the obstacle that this man opposed to the divine will, instead of converting and convincing him, Paul abused him

according to the present practice of theologians, and called him a child of the devil, and finished with striking him with blindness. If this conduct was conducive to the salvation of the proconsul, who according to the author of the Acts, having seen this miracle, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord, there are many who will not be so edified, at this prodigy, so contrary to Christian charity and mildness. In fact would it not have been more kind of St. Paul armed with divine power, to have enlightened the eyes of the sorcerer's mind, than to have struck those of his body with darkness? But we always see that the miracle that the apostles as well as their divine master had most difficulty in working was that of convincing those who were not disposed to believe every thing.

It appears that on the present occasion, the sorcerer was stronger, in point of reasoning, than St. Paul, which put him in a passion. Logic was not in fact, the most prominent quality in our Apostle, any more than in his brethren and successors. Besides, this holy Missionary was of too impetuous a temper to reason with moderation, and argue in a clear and precise manner. Thus to terminate the dispute with Elymas, he abused him, and perhaps relying on the protection of the proconsul, whom he saw wavering in favour of his doctrine, ventured to strike his antagonist, which deprived him of his sight for a period, for it is easy to deprive a man of the use of his eyes without a miracle¹.

We learn that our Apostle and his associate Barnabas, wrought such miracles at Iconiura, that all the city was divided, one part being in favour of the Jews, and the other for the Apostles. But immediately after we are informed, that "when there was an assault made, both of the Gentiles and also of the Jews, with their rulers, to use them despite-fully, and to stone them, the Apostles were aware of it, and fled to Lystra and Derbe."

This conduct of the inhabitants of Iconiura is certainly inconceivable. Pagans and Jews unite to ill treat and stone our Apostles, who in spite of the divine power which they possess have no other expedient, than to seek safety in flight.

In spite of the inutility of his miracles, Paul worked more at Lystra; he there cured a lame man, in whom by mere inspection he discovered much faith. This gives rise to a suspicion that this might have been a miracle concerted between them. He said to him, with a loud voice, stand upright on thy feet, and he leaped and walked. The people of Lystra were so struck by this prodigy, that they took our two missionaries for gods, and would have offered them sacrifices, but Paul and Barnabas forbade them with great modesty. This great miracle must have been believed, even by the priest of Jupiter, since it is said, that he brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and would have sacrificed with them. This circumstance clearly proves that nobody at Lystra doubted the truth of this miracle. However some Jews who had arrived from Iconium were able to undeceive a whole city, which had seen the miracle of the lame man. The poor St. Paul, who had just before been taken for Jupiter, was stoned, and dragged out of the city for dead; he revived, however, and, in spite of his miracle, he saved himself, with Barnabas by fleeing to Derbe.

The miracle wrought by our saint at Philippi in Macedonia, did not meet with more success, he there cured a girl, who had a spirit of Python, and being by that means possessed of the power of divination, gained great profit to her masters. These, far from acknowledging and admiring the power of a man who reduced to silence Apollo, one of the most powerful gods of paganism,

¹ This, it must in candour be acknowledged, is an inference which the text will not warrant us to draw, and is unworthy Boulanger's pen. It seems to be compromising the dignity of truth, to impose upon itself the necessity of accounting for all the hocus pocus tricks, or wilful falsehoods, which the ignorance, bigotry, and knavery of a deplorable superstition, have handed down through the mist of eighteen centuries.—Translators

brought Paul and Silas before the magistrates, and excited the people against them. It is right to remark in this place, that Apollo (i. e. the Devil) who resided in this prophetic, laboured to destroy his own empire. In fact having perceived Paul and his comrade, the girl followed them, crying, these men are the servants of the Most High God, which shew unto us the way of salvation. And this did she many days. But Paul being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her, and he came out the same hour².

It is surprising that Paul was grieved at a declaration so favourable to his mission, and that he should impose silence on a demon, whose testimony was so honourable, and likely to draw adherents! but the conduct of saints is always inexplicable.

In these unhappy times in which faith is so cold, no credit is given, either to those possessed, or to soothsayers; it is difficult to know what the nature of the spirit of Python, which inhabited the Macedonian girl could have been³. If we might hazard a conjecture on the subject, it might be supposed that our Apostles, to give themselves some relief, gained her over, and employed her to play her part, by giving her to understand that it would be her interest to attach herself to the new sect, rather than work for masters, who, probably, paid her very poorly for her services from which they drew all the profit.

The magistrates of Philippi on the complaint of those masters, as we have seen, caused our exorcists to be flogged, and sent them to prison. An earthquake happened very opportunely, the jailor was gained over or converted; the magistrates, thinking the Missionaries had been sufficiently punished, permitted them to depart; but then, as we have seen, they declared themselves Roman citizens, and refused to go, until the magistrates, who were now intimidated, consented to make them an honourable reparation.

Notwithstanding the miracles wrought by Paul during his mission, disagreeable reports every where accompanied him, or followed him, so closely in all the cities through which he passed, that neither himself nor his comrades could remain long in the same place. They only passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, and repaired to Thessalonica, where, in a very short time, the whole city was in an alarm. Jason, their host, was, as we have already seen, ill treated on their account, it was alleged against our Missionaries, that they overthrew every thing, and in preaching another king than Caesar, seemed desirous of plotting a conspiracy. In consequence of this, as it was a serious accusation, the brethren contrived the escape of Paul and Silas during the night.

Arrived at Berea, our two adventurers, soon excited similar disturbances. Paul repaired to Athens, where the philosophers who heard him, took him for a talker whose brain was unsound. However in spite of his success, which was doubtless very slow, he had the mortification of being compelled to labour at his original trade of tent-making, which was very hard for a preacher ordained to live by the altar, that is to say, one whose trade it was to sell spiritual wares, to those who bound themselves to provide him, wherewith to subsist on credit. Such is clerical traffic. Further, St. Paul takes special care to boast to the Corinthians of his great disinterestedness. He

² Acts xvi. 17, 18.

³ Some critics have been very much embarrassed, to conjecture what the nature of this spirit of Python could have been: several have thought that those who had this spirit, were such as are known to us in the present day by the name of ventriloquists, who have the power of articulating words, more or less distinctly, without any motion of the lips being perceptible. There are such persons, who create much surprise to those unacquainted with this faculty, and we cannot be astonished that the vulgar, who doat upon the marvellous, should attribute this power to supernatural causes.

makes them understand he would not be chargeable upon them; by which he appears to have intended some indirect reproaches, calculated to pique their pride and excite their generosity, towards the holy man who laboured for their salvation⁴. The Corinthians probably imagined that men who performed miracles, had no need of assistance: but our miracle-mongers were under the necessity of satisfying their wants by ordinary methods. They were like the adepts, who were always in poverty though offering to others the secret of making gold.

There is reason to believe that Paul performed great miracles amongst the Corinthians, at least he says to them himself "Truly the signs of an apostle, were wrought among you in all patience, in signs and wonders and in mighty deeds⁵." However we find that these miracles had not yet sufficiently convinced the Corinthians, since Paul says to them "Seek ye a proof of Christ speaking in me, which to you ward is not weak, but is mighty in you⁶."

Respecting the miracles wrought by St. Paul at Corinth, we have only his own evidence, and that is sufficient; the author of the Acts though very free upon this article does not inform us, that he wrought any in this city, this was most likely the case, since he remained there a long time, an unusual circumstance, where he condescended to perform miracles, which generally compelled him to remove, in consequence of the disturbance they excited. He was obliged to quit Ephesus, where we are assured, that he performed a great number, and where handkerchiefs, linen, &c. which had touched him, cured the sick, and expelled devils. He departed from Troas directly after having raised a dead man to life, or at least after having asserted that a young man, who was thought so, was in reality not so. In short in the isle of Malta he cured himself of the bite, either because the reptile had not in fact bitten him, or by applying fire to the wound, a remedy which though common, might be unknown to the inhabitants of the island, as we have already remarked.

⁴ See 2. Corinthians, chap. xi. ver. 7, 8, 9, 16. Chap. xii. ver. 13, and also 1. Corinthians chap. ix. ver 11,13, 14,

⁵ 2 Corinthians xii. 12.

⁶ 2 Corinthians xiii. 3.

CHAPTER XIX. Analysis of the writings attributed to St. Paul

After having examined the character of St. Paul by His conduct, it will be proper to make some reflections on his writings; they will serve to place in a still clearer light, this celebrated man, to whom Christianity owes so many obligations. If we confine ourselves to those works attributed to him, the Apostle of the Gentiles must have been a very extraordinary compound of discordant qualities, which when united must have produced an inexplicable whole. He himself informs us, that he had within him two men, the new man and the old man; the just man, and the sinner. He had two bodies, the one natural and the other spiritual; the body of sin and death, and the body of justification and life. He had within him, two laws, which regulated his actions, the law of sin, and the law of justice, the law of the flesh, and the law of the spirit. Never was poor mortal so perplexed and teased, than was our Apostle according to his own account, by these two opposite laws, which he had within himself. The carnal man makes him say, (see Romans, chapter vii. verse 18, to the end of the chapter.)

In other places the spiritual man, makes him hold another language, he assures the Galatians, that he is one with Christ and crucified with him (see Galatians. chapter vii. verse 19 and 20.) In another place he says to the Romans. "For the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." It is clear that this duplicity of nature and law in St. Paul as acknowledged by himself is calculated to throw us into much embarrassment. In fact how can we distinguish in his conduct or discourse, that which springs from the old, from that which arises from the new man, or the spirit of life and the grace of Christ? Is it very easy at this time, to determine which governed St. Paul in those moments in which he spoke, acted, or wrote? Perhaps those maxims and dogmas most admired by Christians have been the suggestions of the flesh, the fruits of the old man, and that this old man often influenced his conduct, which, as we have shewn was not at all times free from reproach. In short the acknowledgments are of a nature well calculated to plunge the most firm Christians into uncertainties from which, without supernatural assistance, they will have great difficulty in extricating themselves. These confessions may further serve to shew us the inconsistencies, contradictions, absurdities, the sophistry and superficial reasoning, and disjointed ideas, which we meet with at every page of the writings attributed to St. Paul. It is to be presumed, that it is the Holy Ghost, or Christ, who speaks when he appears reasonable, it would be blasphemous to say or think, that they could talk nonsense: in this case we shall say, that it is St. Paul or the flesh, who speaks, when we find him using bad arguments, extravagancies, and unintelligible nonsense. We cannot imagine that the spirit of God would have made him utter contradictions, or inspired him with a language incomprehensible to those whom he designed to enlighten and instruct by the mouth of this Apostle. In fact, St. Peter himself complains of the obscurities of Paul's epistles, in which, says he, "are some things hard to be understood."¹

¹ 2 Epis. Peter, chap. iii. ver. 16

The distinction which we have just made will enable us to judge of the works of St. Paul, and explain the obscurities which we find in them, as well as the continual variations, which we must remark in his principles. He tells the Galatians that he was angry with Peter, and withstood him to his face, and that he was offended, with the other apostles, because they temporized and used dissimulation, sometimes advocating the usages of the Jews, and at others the customs of the Gentiles².

Elsewhere he says (here see 1 Corinthians, chap. ix. ver. 19 to 22.) According to these passages, is it right to temporize, or not? It remains for our doctors to decide which of these two principles has been divinely inspired to St. Paul, and in which of them we ought to imitate this great Saint. Our doctors however are not much in the habit of temporizing with their enemies unless they find themselves, too weak to cope with them.

Our Apostle declares, formally to the Galatians that circumcision, is useless and will avail them nothing, he says the same thing to the Corinthians, Yet we find him circumcising his dear Timothy, and he tells the Romans that circumcision is useful to those who fulfil the law.

He writes to Timothy, that God is the saviour of all men especially of the faithful, which evidently supposes that the unfaithful, will not be excluded from Salvation. He had also said, that God willed that all should be saved. But speaking to the Romans, he will not allow that the gates of Paradise, shall be opened to all the world³.

We should never finish, were we to relate all the contradictions which are to be found in the writings attributed to St. Paul. It is clear that if he be really the author of them, he exhibits himself to us, as a fanatical writer, whose disordered head prevents him from seeing that he is eternally contradicting himself. He says that black is white. He follows only the impulses of a heated imagination; he establishes principles to destroy them immediately; in a word from his want of logic, and the little connexion of his ideas without a most lively faith we should suspect, that he was in a continual state of delirium.

It cannot be denied that this great Saint was of a temperament too ardent to allow him to reason connectedly, or to speak with coolness. The tumultuous ideas which presented themselves in crowds to his brain, did not permit him to put them into any thing like an orderly arrangement; he incessantly wandered from his subject, so much so that an imagination, as warm as his own, is necessary in order to follow him in his flights. Perpetually involved in figures, allusions and allegories, it is nearly impossible to guess what are his real sentiments. According to his doctrine he appears to establish in the strongest manner the dreadful doctrine of absolute predestination and reprobation. According to him God grants grace to whom he pleases, and whom he pleases he hardens. If we demand how this doctrine can be reconciled with the goodness and justice of God; or how a God who operates in man the will and the deed, can be offended with the wills and actions of men? He extricates himself by asking if the vessel shall say to him who made it, why hast thou fashioned me thus? Thus St. Paul, and after him all Christian doctors, explain the conduct of a God, whom they pretend to love, at the same time that they hold him up as a tyrant, who is not accountable for his most unjust caprices, and despot-like is restrained by no rule!

St. Paul being divinely inspired should have taught us something of the nature of the soul, an object which so embarrasses all philosophers who not being illumined from above, have formed ideas upon this subject, so much at variance with those of our Christian doctors. But far from

² Galatians chap. ii. ver. 11, &c.

³ Romans, chap. xi. ver. 7.

throwing any light upon this important matter, our Apostle, who appears strongly tinctured with the platonic philosophy so universally taught in his time, distinguishes the body, soul and spirit, and thus obscures the thing still more. But it is the essence of theology to confound every thing, and the interest of theologians to plunge mankind into a labyrinth, from which nothing but faith can extricate them.

CHAPTER XX. Of Faith, in what this Virtue consists

Generally speaking it is St. Paul, or the author of the Epistles, (wherever he be) that are attributed to him, that ought to be regarded as the true founder of Christian theology. The mysterious obscurity of his works, the tone of fanaticism which reigns in them, and the unintelligible oracles with which they are filled, render them well suited to impose on the vulgar, who respect things only in proportion as they are impossible to be comprehended. Devout enthusiasm and pious melancholy there finds a continual feast for its sickly brain. Oracles and enigmas are taken for divine mysteries, which without a strong dose of faith we should conclude were the production of delirium or the inventions of imposture, which seeks to put reason to flight. Reason had no means of examining ideas which are totally unreasonable; thus they persuaded men that it was necessary to renounce reason in order to become a good Christian. In consequence of this principle, so humiliating to mankind and derogatory to the character of a God, the author of reason, it was no longer permitted to examine anything; man was commanded blindly to subscribe to the most incomprehensible reveries, and it was considered meritorious to renounce common sense and adopt fables and opinions revolting to every thinking being. Thus delirium was changed into wisdom, deception into truth, and frequently crime became virtue. They closed the mouths of reasoners by citing the language of Paul, who had said "that the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men." According to the same Apostle God himself had predicted by the mouth of a prophet, the revolution that Christianity was to produce in the minds of mankind. "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent." Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world, &c.¹ And he concludes by saying, "But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness."

However violent Paul's enthusiasm may have been, he well knew how odd the doctrine he preached, must appear to reasonable beings. He must have been aware, that it overturned all received ideas; that it would not bear the test of examination; that it was a difficult enterprise to persuade sensible beings that a God could die, that this God had arisen again, that an immutable God had changed and annulled the eternal alliance he had made with the Jews, and which been so repeatedly confirmed with oaths, &c. Thus our Apostle in order to pass such improbable opinions, believed it requisite, to substitute folly in the place of reason, and to fortify his disciples against the weapons of logic. For the evidence which results from the testimony of the senses be substituted faith, which according to him is the evidence of things not seen, and evidence which can only be founded on the most stupid credulity.

Thus this prudent orator took care to guard against the philosophy of common sense, and against all science, seeing clearly that they opposed, invincible obstacles to the religion that

¹ 1 Corinth, chap. i. ver. 19.

he sought to establish, and of which he pretended to be the soul and chief. Hence we find he attached the greatest merit to faith, that is to say, to a blind submission to his authority; and such an unbounded confidence in himself as prevented any doubt of those things, the truth of which he attested.

As science was injurious to the establishment of his empire he decried it. "Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth." By charity, we may here understand that affection to a spiritual director which closing the eyes against those defects, which in common with other men he may possess, convinces us that he is always right, that he is incapable of the wish to deceive, and in short, that he ought to be believed in preference to the evidence of our senses.

It is thus that this great Apostle laboured incessantly to establish his own authority on the ruins of wisdom, reason, and science. However we may reply to his doctrine, so useful to those whose interest it is to maintain absurd opinions and incredible fables, that God who, is, according to them, the author of reason could not have destroyed his own work. We shall demand of St. Paul and of those who like him preach up implicit faith, if folly is more able than wisdom to attain to the knowledge of God? We shall ask of them, if God has given wisdom to men on condition of their never using it, and if it is not by the aid of human wisdom, that man gains some idea of the divine wisdom? We shall ask if God can, without absolutely changing the nature of things, make wisdom folly, and folly wisdom? In short we shall ask them, if in order to become a Christian it is necessary to renounce common sense, or how far our folly must prevail to have a religion?

To all these questions theologians, faithfully treading in the steps of St. Paul, will reply, that we must believe, and that as soon as they speak, we must submit to their authority. "Faith" says Paul "comes by hearing," whence it results that have faith, we must sacrifice our reason, to the wills of our spiritual pastors. Charity ought to convince us, that these infallible guides, can neither deceive nor desire to lead us into error.

According to this firm persuasion we shall never be embarrassed, unless, by chance, those pastors should happen to disagree in their opinions. This however often occurs in the church, and has done from the commencement. In fact we have seen St. Paul himself resist St. Peter to his face and differ from him in opinion. Their quarrels like many others had fatal results, and produced a true schism between the partizans of Peter, and those of Paul, the Apostle of the Gentiles.

The latter has acknowledged himself, that there must be heresies in a church, perpetually guided by the most high. This prophecy has been verified in the Christian religion, which from its foundation has been incessantly agitated by quarrels, divisions, animosities, troubles, and paroxysms of fury that would induce a belief, that the gospel was given to nations only to excite in them, fermentations unknown to Paganism, and show them to what a degree of madness credulity could lead.

The writings of Paul especially have furnished in all ages ample matter, for disputes to the Christian doctors. The obscure dogmas they contain, have of necessity been diversely understood by profound dreamers, who have passed their time in meditation. Each pretended to have discovered the true sense of this infallible and divinely inspired doctor. Each found in his writings a confirmation of his own sentiments. Works filled with contradiction continually gave rise to parties the most opposite to each other, and virulently bent upon mutual destruction. The authority of St. Paul was opposed to himself, and in the impossibility of deciding upon questions totally out of the power of reason to discuss, recourse was had to violence, and the strongest always made the weak feel, that they alone comprehended the true sense of the great Apostle. They dis-

puted continually on predestination, on grace, and on the liberty of man; they understood neither themselves nor St. Paul. The most headstrong, the most wicked, and the most powerful, enforced their opinions as the only ones which the Holy Ghost had dictated.

To conclude, the incredulous, are not those, who alone find the writings of Paul obscure and unintelligible, as we have seen in the the case of St. Peter already quoted. If this prince of the Apostles founded difficulties in the work of St. Paul, what shall we think of the presumption of modern commentators when they pretend to explain to us, the enigmatical and confused passages that we meet with in the epistles of this doctor of the Gentiles.

CHAPTER XXI. Of the Holy Ghost, and Divine Inspiration

It would however have been wiser in the first instance to examine into the degree of confidence due to the real or pretended writings of this wonderful man, whose history we have been developing. Before disputing it would have been better to have been certain of the authority of an Apostle whose works appear to us infallible only on his own word, or on that of the written to whom we owe the Acts of the Apostles. In fact we are told that St. Paul was inspired by the Holy Ghost. But what is the Holy Ghost? How can it inspire a man? What certainty have we that it has ever inspired anyone? By what signs shall we distinguish these invisible inspirations? As it is upon these inspirations only that the Christian religion is established, these questions are well worth the trouble of being discussed.

There is no mention made of the Holy Ghost in the Old Testament; there is mention made of the spirit of the Lord, which possessed, or resided in the prophets, and other holy personages charged with speaking to the Jewish people; but in no place of the Old Testament is the Holy Ghost announced as a being distinct from the Divinity, it is only in the New Testament that we find this metaphysical being deified, or this divine breath personified. In fact it is only in the history of Jesus Christ, that the Holy Ghost begins to perform, a part; we there find him commissioned to overshadow Mary, and produce the saviour of the world, who was, as we are told, begotten by the operation of the Holy Ghost.

This same Holy Ghost descended in the form of a dove upon Jesus Christ at the moment of his baptism in the river Jordan by John the Baptist. In the Gospel according to St. John, the author of which appears to have drawn his ideas from the platonic philosophy, there is much talk of the Holy Ghost which is never defined. Jesus promises to send him to the disciples when he himself shall have left them. This spirit is described under term of the Paraclete or Comforter. Jesus assures them that he proceeded from the father, and that he will send him on the part of the father, to bear witness of him Jesus. Further on he promises them, that when this spirit shall come, he shall guide them into all truth.

According to the promise of Jesus, this comforter did in fact descend upon the Apostles at the feast of Pentecost, see Acts *ari. ver.* 2, 3, 13. Many were astonished at the prodigy there related, but it seems not to have convinced others, who had probably less faith than the first. These sceptics pretended that the inspired Apostles were drunken with new wine. But Peter filled with the spirit, made them a long prophetic harangue; which, according to the author of the Acts, produced a great effect upon many of his hearers, who were converted upon the spot.

In consequence of the descent of the Holy Ghost, the Apostles received the power, not only of speaking divers tongues, but likewise of driving out devils and performing miracles. However we do not find by their history, though written by one favourable to their cause, that the Holy Ghost gave them the power to cast out the demon of incredulity, especially from the minds of the

Jews; these resisted constantly the Holy Ghost and made those who said they were filled with it, to suffer cruel treatment.

the Apostles had not only received the Holy Ghost, but they had also received the power of communicating it to others by the imposition of hands. It is difficult, without a submissive faith, to conceive a clear idea of this invisible communication of the Holy Ghost, or the manner in which an indivisible spirit, divides itself among so many different individuals. However it is not allowed us to doubt that this transmission of the Holy Ghost has been perpetuated down from the Apostles to our time. It is still by imposition of hands that the guides of the Christian Church receive the Holy Ghost, and the right to teach. If our bishops and and priests who represent in our eyes the Apostles and disciples, have not received the gift of tongues and miracles they have, at least, received the faculty of pretending, that the Holy Ghost does not cease to illuminate them, in their frequently contradictory decisions, which ought to be regarded as a great prodigy.

A Christian would run the risk of being damned if he should dare to doubt, that the Holy Ghost invisibly presided in the church and will reside in the brains of its chiefs until the consummation of all things. What can be more calculated to inspire us with regard and respect for those, who themselves assure us, that they are the living temples of the Holy Ghost. In gratitude for these advantages which the Holy Ghost procured to the ministers of the Christian religion, they felt themselves bound to deify him. It was the least they could do for a being from whom their power clearly emanated. In fact if the Holy Ghost, charged with inspiring the church had not been a God, the authority of the church might have been contested. But it being clearly decided, that the Holy Ghost is a God, men are no longer permitted to dispute his rights; it only remains to them to subscribe blindly to the decisions of those whom he has chosen for his organs; to contradict them, would be to revolt against God.

We see then how important it was to the heads of the church to apotheosise the Holy Ghost. It was necessary to make him a God at any rate; otherwise the church would not have been infallible, its infallibility being founded, solely on the continued inspirations of the Holy Ghost; and that he himself should be infallible, it was necessary that he should be a God. Thus the church has wisely made the God which makes her infallible.

However useful this deification was to the church, it was attended with some difficulties. In fact how could they reconcile this new God, this Mercury, this messenger of the father and son, with the unity of God? To cut short all dispute upon so important a matter, the heads of the church decided that the Holy Ghost proceeded from the father and son, and yet made but one God with them. They closed the mouths of those who cried out against this unintelligible oracle, by saying it was a mystery, that man was made to adore and believe, without being able to comprehend; they added that the church was infallible had thus decided, that being inspired by the Holy Ghost (i.e. by a God) it was impossible to avoid believing that she had the right to decide, that the Holy Ghost was a God.

This is sufficient to show us upon what the authority of church, and the divinity of the Holy Ghost is founded. The church has deified the Holy Ghost, and the divinity of the Holy Ghost serves as the basis of the authority of the church. We thus see the true foundations of Ecclesiastical power; we see the solidity of the titles of the church, we see the true origin of the mystery of the trinity, now held in such veneration by the faithful. In short we see what we ought to think of the inspirations of the Holy Ghost from the time of its origin until now.

CHAPTER XXII. Of the Inspiration of the Prophets of the Old Testament

It does not appear, as we have already observed, that the Jews had any precise ideas of the Holy Ghost similar to those of the Christian theologians. Moreover there is reason to believe, that the Apostles had not yet imagined such subtle notions of it, as the church has invented since their time. Amongst the Hebrews, every man who, during his sleep, had dreams, every enthusiast who had, or pretended to have visions, believed himself inspired by the Lord, or at least gave himself out as such. He regarded the fancies of his brain, as warnings from heaven; he delivered his pious nonsense as oracles to credulous hearers, who did not doubt for an instant, that the unintelligible delirium of these harangues, was the effect of some divine illumination from the Almighty. As in dreams, madness, in ebriation, in enthusiasm, man does not appear master of himself, they believed that what he uttered in these divers states must, of necessity, spring, from some supernatural force acting in him, without his knowledge, and in spite of himself; the sentences and discourse, which issued from his mouth, were regarded as inspirations from on high, and received as divine commands. Their obscurity only served to excite curiosity, redouble terror, and confuse the imagination. It was supposed that God, who spoke by these demoniacs, did not choose to express himself in a clearer manner.

These reflections founded upon the nature of credulous, ignorant, and superstitious men, may serve to fix our ideas of so many prophets and jugglers, that we see play such a prominent part, not only in Jewish history, but in all Pagan antiquity, and even among all savage and uninformed people that are now scattered over the globe. The trade of prophesying, appears to have been very lucrative and respectable amongst the Jews, a people degraded by superstition, and whose priests always took care to keep them in a state of profound ignorance, and credulity, well-suited for the ends of those who sought to direct them after their own fancies. Whoever desired to gain the attention of the Jews, announced himself as inspired, threatened or promised them in the name of the Lord, prophesied to them of evils calculated to intimidate, or of happy events which seduced them into belief. To draw the attention of the public, and frequently to produce revolutions in the state, it was enough for a prophet to say gravely, that the Lord had spoken to him; and assure them that heaven had intrusted him with its designs in a vision; thus the brains of the Jews were put into a fermentation. The Apostles desirous of establishing reform, or exciting a revolution, in men's minds, felt the necessity of conforming to the prevailing list of the nation. In consequence they erected themselves into prophets, gave themselves out for inspired, spoke in an obscure manner, uttered oracles, predicted the end of the world, they preached a messiah, they announced a kingdom in which their followers would enjoy a happiness, which their subjugated country had long since been deprived of. In short to prove the truth of their predictions, and the legitimacy of their mission, they performed miracles, i.e. works calculated to astonish so credulous a people as the Jews.

The Jews, however, in spite of all their ignorance, did not suffer themselves to be convinced by either the harangues and miracles of Jesus, nor by the preachings and prodigies of his Apostles. All their efforts failed against the hardness of heart of a people so often the dupe of the numberless inspired who had so successfully deceived them. There is then reason to think that Jesus and his disciples did not perform their part well, or else that in their time, the Jews become more cautious, had not so much faith as their ancestors had formerly exhibited. Indeed we do not find that the first preachers of Christianity made much impression upon their fellow citizens; they had much more success, and Paul especially amongst idolators, for whom their enthusiastic harangues, their preachings, and miracles was a more novel spectacle. Amongst the Gentiles preaching was an unknown thing, the people was held in disdain by the priests; each formed such ideas of religion as he choose, there was no theological system that they were compelled to adopt; in short, with the exception of Esculapius, the Gods worked but few miracles for their worshippers.

Thus, as we have already observed, circumstances were favourable for the mission of our Apostle amongst the Gentiles; they were more disposed to listen than the Jews, and to regard him who performed such wonders before them, as an extraordinary man favoured by heaven. In fact St. Paul gave himself out for such. And how can we doubt the veracity of a man who performs miracles? It was then necessary to give him credit; and without having seen these miracles we believe the same thing, and especially his divine inspiration, upon the authority of the writings, attributed to him, and upon the word of him who has transmitted to us an account of his actions in the Acts of the Apostles, works which the church enjoins us to regard as divinely inspired. It would be, I think, useless to make any long reflections on the validity of the titles of the church, and the right, that the writings which she has adopted have to the claim of divine inspiration. It is enough to remark, that if we admit those titles and rights, we have no reason to refuse also to admit those of any man, or body of men, which shall give themselves out as divinely inspired. If, on the word of Paul, we believe that he was inspired, why shall we not have the same deference for the word of Mahomet, who pretended to be the sent of the most high? If, after the decision of the Christian church, we regard the books contained in the New Testament as dictated by the Holy Ghost; what right have we to refuse our assent to the decision of the body of Imans and Mollahs, that the Koran was revealed by the angel Gabriel to Mahomet? if it be permitted to one man, or body of men, to invest themselves with titles, and at the same time forbid the titles to be investigated, we shall be obliged to admit all the reveries, extravagancies, and fables that we see spread over the various countries of the earth. Priests every where show us books, which they say were inspired by the divinity, and weak and silly people adore and follow without examination books thus announced. All religions in the world are founded upon sacred hooks which contain the divine will, and whose truth is proved by miracles.

CHAPTER. XXIII. Of the Descent of the Holy Ghost upon the Apostles, or their Divine Inspiration

If we may believe the author of the Acts of the Apostles, the disciples assembled at Jerusalem on the the day of Pentecost, were filled with the Holy Ghost. But by what sign shall we be sure that they were filled with the Holy Ghost? It is this that they began to speak divers languages. But do these various languages prove the presence of the Holy Ghost? Could not the disciples of Jesus speak these languages naturally? However the Jews who had come from the different provinces of Asia to Jerusalem to celebrate the feast all understood Hebrew, since it was the language in which their law was written; nothing more then was requisite but to speak Hebrew, in order to be understood by all of them; we cannot suppose that men assembled at Jerusalem to celebrate the Pentecost were Gentiles. That granted of what use was the gift tongues? In supposing that among the Jews there were some who only understood Greek, which was at that time universal over all Asia, it is very possible that without a miracle, some of the disciples or Apostles, might know this language by the aid of which they could make themselves understood in most of the provinces mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles.

There is then reason for believing, that the Apostles and disciples were on this occasion desirous of passing for inspired. With this view, according to the practice of the diviners and prophets amongst the Jews, they made noises contortions, cries, &c, and produced an extravagant cacophony, which, many well disposed persons mistook for undoubted sign of inspiration, while those who were less credulous took them for certain proofs of drunkenness or folly. But St. Peter justified them, and showed that what they received to be extravagancies ought to be considered as proofs of inspiration. This he confirmed by quoting a prophecy of the prophet Joel, (see Acts of Apostles, chap. ii. ver. 17.)

But the question at issue is, whether visions, dreams, extravagancies, &c. are signs of divine inspiration. It is true that from the contents of the books, which Christians regard as dictated by the Holy Ghost, and examining the nonsense and contradictions found in the writings of St. Paul, we should be tempted to believe so. If the absence of reason, probability, logic, and harmony, is the distinguishing mark of divine inspiration, we cannot deny that St. Paul has proved himself, by his writings, to have been divinely inspired.

However at this rate nothing can be more easy than to pass; for inspired. If madness be a sufficient qualification to cause a man to be regarded as one filled with the Holy Ghost, there are many men who have just pretensions to this faculty. If we doubt it they have only to reply gravely that God hath confounded the wisdom of the wise; that our rebellious reason ought to be submissive, that the human mind becomes perverted by reasoning. Such is however the language continually repeated by the supporters of St. Paul and Christianity. According to them, wisdom is folly, reason an uncertain guide, common sense useless, and contradictions are impenetrable

mysteries, which we must adore in silence; and when our mind loses itself in the abyss of folly and imposture, they cry out with their great Apostle: "Oh! the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his ways, and his judgments past finding out!" A lucky quibble of which our theologians avail themselves with success, in order to escape from the embarrassment into which they are thrown by any reasoning on the ways of providence.

It is thus that those who pretend to inspiration have the boldness to outrage the Divinity, and make the Holy Ghost the accomplice of their blasphemies. When they find it impossible to escape from the labyrinth into which impostures and ill-contrived fables have led them, they make God responsible for their extravagancies; they pretend that their own follies are the effects of divine wisdom, they term their own perplexities mysteries; and assent that the author of reason is at the same time, the enemy of reason.

Men however are not shocked by these impious propositions. Accustomed to regard St. Paul as inspired, it never occurs to them that so great a Saint may blaspheme. But what authority have Christians for their high opinion of St. Paul? It is the Acts of the Apostles, that is to say upon the suspected testimony of a partizan of Paul's sect, who has compiled a history of his hero, filled with contradictions, but embellished with prodigies and fable, which however serve to establish his romance. But what proofs have we of these miracles themselves? We have no other evidence than the word of the Romancer himself confirmed by the authority of the church, i.e. of a body of men interested in establishing the fable.

It is true that we have in addition the testimony of St. Paul himself, to whom are attributed the epistles in which are found a great number of details of his life. But does this Apostle agree with his historian in his own narrative? No, doubtless, they vary materially in many circumstances, and frequently contradict each other in the most positive manner. Who then shall we find to reconcile them, and show us what we ought to think of a history so differently related? The church. But what is the church? A body composed of the spiritual guides of the Christians. Have these guides been witnesses of the actions and miracles so differently related by Paul and his historian? No; they know nothing of them but by a tradition, contested even in the times of the first Christians, but since confirmed by a revelation of the Holy Ghost, who never, according to them, ceases to enlighten his church. How are we to know if the church is continually inspired? She herself says so, and there is, she says, the greatest danger in doubting this. It would be to resist the Holy Ghost who is identified with the church, and who makes common cause with her; a crime which will never be forgiven either in this world or in the next. Of all sins the most unpardonable is to resist the clergy.

CHAPTER XXIV. General reflections on the foundations of Christian Faith, and on the Causes of Credulity

These then are the only foundations of faith! Christians are obliged to believe that St. Paul was neither an enthusiast nor a cheat, because the church has decided that he was divinely inspired: the church has decided this important point of belief, according to the Acts of the Apostles and epistles, which, as we have shown, were both rejected by many sects of the primitive Christians, and which, as we have proved in the course of this work, are filled with contradictions and absurdities.

Nevertheless no Christian now dares to doubt of the authenticity of these books. These works are regarded as sacred by the universal church, by Christians of all sects, who with the exception notwithstanding of some considerable and important variations, read them in the same manner and entertain for them the same veneration. What can we oppose to this unanimity? The example of Mahomet. This prophet who is at this day equally revered by all sects of Mussulmen, was at first regarded as an impostor at Mecca, whence he was compelled to fly. His Koran now become the rule and code of a clergy, supported by princes and powerful nations, was at first considered as a tissue of fables compiled by imposture. This unanimity of the Mahometans, in acknowledging the sanctity of Mahomet, and the divinity of the Koran proves no more in their favour, than the agreement of all sects of Christians in admitting the Saintship of Paul, and the inspiration of his writings, proves in favour of the Apostle and his wonderful epistles.

It is the property of habit to change the appearance of things, men by degrees become familiar with that which at first disgusted them; time is able to confound truth and falsehood; clearly proved deceptions, finish by becoming undoubted facts to the ignorant, the idle, and those either too much occupied, or involved in dissipation to examine, and these are the majority of mankind. The most palpable imposture when it has existed a length of time, acquires a solidity which nothing can shake: that which has been believed by many for ages appears to have a real foundation, and to have at least a claim to probability. When once time has obliterated the traces of imposture, they are difficult to detect, and most men find it easier to stick to received opinions than to undergo the painful task of examining what they ought to think.

Such are the true causes of the indolence that men generally show, as often as they are called upon to give a reason for their religious notions, they are contented to follow the current. Besides when prejudice is supported by force, and becomes necessary to the interests of a powerful body, it is dangerous to combat it, and few men have the courage to oppose deceptions, approved by the world, and authorised by the governing powers.

On the other hand error, when habitual passes for truth, and is equally agreeable. We hold fast to our vices and prejudices, the virtues and opinions which are opposed to them, appear

ridiculous or disagreeable. It is this natural disposition of the human, species, which, by little and little, imbue nations with the most extravagant opinions, absurd fables, and ill-digested systems.

No, artifice was; ever better imagined, nor trick was ever more calculated to deceive the vulgar than that of divine inspiration. Upon this is founded all the religions in the world; it is to this marvellous invention that the priests of the whole earth are indebted for their authority, their riches, and their existence. When a man tells us, that he is divinely inspired, it is difficult for most men to ascertain whether he lie, or speak the truth. God never contradicts those who make him speak, on the contrary those impostors who deceive in his name generally perform miracles and prodigies, and these miracles and prodigies, are to the short sighted multitude undoubted signs of divine favor.

Shall we then judge those who are inspired by their conduct? They generally take care to impose on us by their disinterestedness, patience, and mildness of behaviour, and it can hardly be supposed that such moderate men could have formed the design of deceiving or gaining power. It is only when they have gently insinuated themselves into men's minds, that we find ambition, avarice, and passions of the missionary develop themselves: it is after having won over the multitude, that their empire discovers itself; and they exact with pride, the tribute and respect due to the organs of heaven, and the messengers of the most high.

These are the means by which Christianity has been established, the manoeuvres have been practised by our great Apostle, and all those who have assisted in disseminating his doctrine. His own experience often made Paul sensible, that his pride and fiery disposition, were frequently obstacles to his mission; thus we see him sometimes do violence to his character, take the air of mildness and humility, so much better suited, to insinuate into mens good opinions than arrogance and pride. He only assumes the tone of the master, when he knows his ground; then he threatens, thunders, and displays his authority. Does a dispute arise between himself and an associate? He resists him to his face; he makes the church feel how necessary he is to the cause; and avails himself of it, to exhibit his authority, His example has been at all times faithfully followed by the heads of the Christian religion. Humble, mild, patient, tolerant, and disinterested whenever they have been weak, they become haughty, quarrelsome, intolerant, avaricious, and rebellious subjects to princes whenever they were certain of their empire over the people. It was then that they prescribed laws, crushed their enemies, plundered the people, and caused kings to tremble at the name of the God whose interpreters they declared themselves to be.

The heads of the Christian religion have at all times made those opinions, most comfortable to their own interest pass for divine oracles. The Holy Ghost has had no other function, than to serve for a cloak to their intrigues, passions, and pretensions. The works of our Apostle furnished quarrelsome priests with arguments for injuring each other; his disjointed reveries, his obscure mysteries, and his ambiguous oracles, were an arsenal whence the most opposite parties procured arms to combat incessantly. In short the writings inspired by a God who was desirous of instructing mankind, have only served to plunge nations in darkness. Guides enlightened by the Holy Ghost saw no clearer than the ignorant, into mysteries, they continually presented to them by an unintelligible system. These great doctors were agreed upon nothing, each one sought to gain adherents whom he excited against the enemies of his own opinions, which he regarded as those only approved by heaven. Thence arose animosities, hatred, persecutions, and wars, which have a thousand times spread trouble and desolation among Christians, blind enough to follow men who pretended to be led by the Holy Ghost, while it was evident, that the only spirit which inspired them, was that of pride, ambition, obstinacy, vengeance, avarice, and rebellion.

CONCLUSION.

Let us then be careful, oh! my friends, of allowing ourselves to be guided by inspired persons. Deceivers, or enthusiasts, they will only lead us into errors destructive of our peace. Let us consult reason, so decried by men, whose interest it is to extinguish a light which is able to show us the plots of their dark policy, this reason will inform us that contradictory works do not merit our belief; that a turbulent, ambitious and enthusiastic Apostle, may have been a very useful Saint to the church, and a very bad citizen. This reason will convince us, that a God filled with wisdom could never inspire men with systems, in which folly is the most prominent feature; that a God who is the author of reason could never have called for its immolation, before the shrine of fable, and pretended mystery incapable of producing any thing but evil and dissension upon the earth. Let us be just, benevolent, peaceable, let us leave to St. Paul, and to those who take him for a model, their lofty ambition, their turbulent fanaticism, their obstinate vanity, their persecuting spirit, and above all things their bitter zeal, which they term an interest for the salvation of souls. Let us show to all men not an evangelic charity which is converted into fury and hatred, but a real charity which inspires us with love, peace, indulgence, and humanity. May this charity so much boasted of, and so little practised, by St. Paul and his successors, be the rule of our conduct, and the standard of our judgments on men and their opinions. Examine all things, and hold fast that which is good. Let us not be blinded by the prejudices, of infancy, of habit, or of authority. Let us not be imposed upon by the pompous names of Paul, of Cephas, or of Apollos; but let us seek the truth and follow reason, which can never lead astray, nor render us troublesome members of society.

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