

VOLTAIRE

A PHILOSOPHICAL
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08

Вольтер

A Philosophical Dictionary, Volume 08

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Voltaire

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MONEY

A word made use of to express gold. "Sir, will you lend me a hundred louis d'or?" "Sir, I would with all my heart, but I have no money; I am out of ready money." The Italian will say to you: "*Signore, non ha di danari*" – "I have no deniers."

Harpagon asks Maître Jacques: "Wilt thou make a good entertainment?" "Yes, if you will give me plenty of money."

We continually inquire which of the countries of Europe is the richest in money? By that we mean, which is the people who circulate the most metals representative of objects of commerce? In the same manner we ask, which is the poorest? and thirty contending nations present themselves – the Westphalian, Limousin, Basque, Tyrolese, Valois, Grison, Istrian, Scotch, and Irish, the Swiss of a small canton, and above all the subjects of the pope.

In deciding which has most, we hesitate at present between France, Spain, and Holland, which had none in 1600.

Formerly, in the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries, the province of the papal treasury had no doubt the most ready money, and therefore the greatest trade. How do you sell that? would be asked of a theological merchant, who replied, For as much as the people are fools enough to give me.

All Europe then sent its money to the Roman court, who gave in change consecrated beads, agnuses, indulgences plenary and limited, dispensations, confirmations, exemptions, benedictions, and even excommunications against those whom the subscriber chose, and who had not sufficient faith in the court of Rome.

The Venetians sold nothing of all this, but they traded with all the West by Alexandria, and it was through them only that we had pepper and cinnamon. The money which went not to the papal treasury came to them, excepting a little to the Tuscans and Genoese. All the other kingdoms of Europe were so poor in ready money that Charles VIII. was obliged to borrow the jewels of the duchess of Savoy and put them in pawn, to raise funds to conquer Naples, which he soon lost again. The Venetians supported stronger armies than his. A noble Venetian had more gold in his coffers, and more vessels of silver on his table, than the emperor Maximilian surnamed "*Pochi danari*."

Things changed when the Portuguese traded with India as conquerors, and the Spaniards subjugated Mexico and Peru with six or seven hundred men. We know that then the commerce of Venice, and the other towns of Italy all fell to the ground. Philip II., the master of Spain, Portugal, the Low Countries, the Two Sicilies, and the Milanese, of fifteen hundred leagues of coast in Asia, and mines of gold and silver in America, was the only rich, and consequently the only powerful prince in Europe. The spies whom he gained in France kissed on their knees the Catholic doubloons, and the small number of angels and caroluses which circulated in that country had not much credit. It is pretended that America and Asia brought him in nearly ten million ducats of revenue. He would have really bought Europe with his money, but for the iron of Henry IV. and the fleets of Queen Elizabeth.

The "*Dictionnaire Encyclopédique*," in the article on "Argent," quotes the "Spirits of Laws," in which it is said: "I have heard deplored a thousand times, the blindness of the council of Francis I., who rejected the proposal of Christopher Columbus for the discovery of the Indies – perhaps this imprudence has turned out a very wise thing."

We see by the enormous power of Philip that the pretended council of Francis I. could not have done such a wise thing. But let us content ourselves with remarking that Francis I. was not born when

it is pretended that he refused the offers of Christopher Columbus. The Genoese captain landed in America in 1492, and Francis I. was born in 1497, and did not ascend the throne until 1515. Let us here compare the revenues of Henry III., Henry IV., and Queen Elizabeth, with those of Philip II. The ordinary income of Elizabeth was only one hundred thousand pound sterling, and with extras it was, one year with another, four hundred thousand; but she required this surplus to defend herself from Philip II. Without extreme economy she would have been lost, and England with her.

The revenue of Henry III. indeed increased to thirty millions of livres of his time; this, to the sum that Philip drew from the Indies, was as three to ten; but not more than a third of this money entered into the coffers of Henry III., who was very prodigal, greatly robbed, and consequently very poor. We find that Philip II. in one article was ten times richer than Henry.

As to Henry IV., it is not worth while to compare his treasures with those of Philip II. Until the Peace of Vervins, he had only what he could borrow or win at the point of his sword; and he lived as a knight-errant, until the time in which he became the first king in Europe. England had always been so poor that King Edward III. was the first king who coined money of gold.

Would we know what became of the money which flowed continually from Mexico and Peru into Spain? It entered the pockets of the French, English and Dutch, who traded with Cadiz under Spanish names; and who sent to America the productions of their manufactories. A great part of this money goes to the East Indies to pay for spices, cotton, saltpetre, sugar, candy, tea, cloths, diamonds, and monkeys.

We may afterwards demand, what is become of all the treasures of the Indies? I answer that Shah Thamas Kouli-Khan or Shah Nadir had carried away all those of the great Mogul, together with his jewels. You would know where those jewels are, and this money that Shah Nadir carried with him into Persia? A part was hidden in the earth during the civil wars; predatory leaders made use of the rest to raise troops against one another; for, as Cæsar very well remarks: "With money we get soldiers, and with soldiers we steal money."

Your curiosity is not yet satisfied; you are troubled to know what have become of the treasures of Sesostris, of Crœ, Cyrus, Nebuchadnezzar, and above all of Solomon, who, it is said, had to his own share equal to twenty millions and more of our pounds in his coffers.

I will tell you. It is spread all over the world. Things find their level in time. Be sure, that in the time of Cyrus, the Gauls, Germany, Denmark, Poland, and Russia, had not a crown. Besides, that which is lost in gilding, which is fooled away upon our Lady of Loretto, and other places, and which has been swallowed up by the avaricious sea must be counted.

How did the Romans under their great Romulus, the son of Mars, and a vestal, and under the devout Numa Pompilius? They had a Jupiter of oak; rudely carved huts for palaces; a handful of hay at the end of a stick for a standard; and not a piece of money of twelve sous value in their pockets. Our coachmen have gold watches that the seven kings of Rome, the Camilluses, Manliuses, and Fabiuses, could not have paid for.

If by chance the wife of a receiver-general of finances was to have this chapter read at her toilette by the bel-esprit of the house, she would have a strange contempt for the Romans of the three first centuries, and would not allow a Manlius, Curius, or Fabius to enter her antechamber, should he come on foot, and not have wherewithal to take his part at play.

Their ready money was of brass. It served at once for arms and money. They fought and reckoned with brass. Three or four pounds of brass, of twelve ounces weight, paid for an ox. They bought necessaries at market, as we buy them at present; and men had, as in all times, food, clothing, and habitations. The Romans, poorer than their neighbors, conquered them, and continually augmented their territory for the space of five hundred years, before they coined silver money.

The soldiers of Gustavus Adolphus in Sweden had nothing but copper money for their pay, before the time that they made conquests out of their own country.

Provided we have a pledge of exchange for the necessary things of life, commerce will continually go on. It signifies not whether this pledge be of shells or paper. Gold and silver have prevailed everywhere, only because they have been the most rare.

It was in Asia that the first manufactures of money of these two metals commenced, because Asia was the cradle of all the arts.

There certainly was no money in the Trojan war. Gold and silver passed by weight; Agamemnon might have had a treasure, but certainly no money.

What has made several hardy scholars suspect that the "Pentateuch" was not written until the time in which the Hebrews began to procure coins from their neighbors is that in more than one passage mention is made of shekels. It is there said that Abraham, who was a stranger and had not an inch of land in the country of Canaan, bought there a field and a cave in which to bury his wife, for four hundred shekels of silver current money. The judicious Dom Calmet values this sum at four hundred and forty-eight livres, six sous, nine deniers, according to the ancient calculation adopted at random, in which the silver mark was of six-and-twenty livres value. As the silver mark has, however, increased by half the sum, the present value would be eight hundred and ninety-six livres.

Now, as in that time there was no coined money answering to the word "*pecunia*," that would make a little difficulty, from which it is not easy to extricate ourselves.

Another difficulty is, that in one place it is said that Abraham bought this field in Hebron, and in another at Sichem. On that point consult the venerable Bede, Raban, Maure, and Emanuel Sa.

We will now speak of the riches which David left to Solomon in coined money. Some make it amount to twenty-one or twenty-two millions of French livres, others to five-and-twenty. There is no keeper of the royal treasure, nor *tefterdan* of the grand Turk's, who can exactly compute the treasure of King Solomon; but the young bachelors of Oxford and the Sorbonne make out the amount without difficulty.

I will not speak of the innumerable adventures which have happened to money since it has been stamped, marked, valued, altered, increased, buried, and stolen, having through all its transformations constantly remained the idol of mankind. It is so much loved that among all Christian princes there still exists an old law which is not to allow gold and silver to go out of their kingdoms. This law implies one of two things – either that these princes reign over fools who lavish their money in a foreign country for their pleasure, or that we must not pay our debts to foreigners. It is, however, clear that no person is foolish enough to give his money without reason, and that, when we are in debt to a foreigner, we should pay him either in bills of exchange, commodities, or legitimate coin. Thus this law has not been executed since we began to open our eyes – which is not long ago.

There are many things to be said on coined money; as on the unjust and ridiculous augmentation of specie, which suddenly loses considerable sums to a state on the melting down again; on the re-stamping, with an augmentation of ideal value, which augmentation invites all your neighbors and all your enemies to re-coin your money and gain at your expense; in short, on twenty other equally ruinous expedients. Several new books are full of judicious remarks upon this subject. It is more easy to write on money than to obtain it; and those who gain it, jest much at those who only know how to write about it.

In general, the art of government consists in taking as much money as possible from one part of the citizens to give to the other.

It is demanded, if it be possible radically to ruin a kingdom of which the soil in general is fertile. We answer that the thing is not practicable, since from the war of 1689 till the end of 1769, in which we write, everything has continually been done which could ruin France and leave it without resource, and yet it never could be brought about. It is a sound body which has had a fever of eighty years with relapses, and which has been in the hands of quacks, but which will survive.

MONSTERS

The definition of monsters is more difficult than is generally imagined. Are we to apply the term to animals of enormous size; to a fish, or a serpent fifteen feet long, for instance? There are some, however, that are twenty or even thirty feet long, in comparison with which of course the others, instead of enormous or monstrous, would appear small.

There are monsters through defect. But, if a generally well-made and handsome man were destitute from his birth of the little toes and little fingers, would he be a monster? Teeth are more necessary to a man; I have seen a man who never had a tooth. He was in other respects pleasing in his person. Being destitute of the organs of generation, still more necessary in the system of nature, would not constitute the person thus defective a monster.

There are monsters by excess as well as by defect. But those who have six fingers, or three testicles, or two perforations instead of one, or the spine elongated in the form of a small tail, are not considered monsters.

The third kind consists of those which have members of other animals; as, for example, a lion with the wings of an ostrich, or a serpent with the wings of an eagle, like the griffin and ixion of the Jews. But all bats have wings, and flying fish have them, without being monsters.

Let us, then, reserve the name for animals whose deformities strike us with horror.

Yet the first negro, upon this idea, was a monster to white women; and the most admirable of European beauties was a monster in the eyes of negroes.

If Polyphemus and the Cyclops had really existed, people who carried an eye on each side of the root of the nose, would, in the island of Lipari, and the neighborhood of Mount Ætna, have been pronounced monsters.

I once saw, at a fair, a young woman with four nipples, or rather dugs, and what resembled the tail of a cow hanging down between them. She was decidedly a monster when she displayed her neck, but was rather an agreeable woman in appearance when she concealed it.

Centaur and Minotaur would have been monsters, but beautiful monsters. The well-proportioned body of a horse serving as a base or support to the upper part of a man would have been a masterpiece of nature's workmanship on earth; just as we draw the masterpieces of heaven – those spirits which we call angels, and which we paint and sculpture in our churches – adorned sometimes with two wings, sometimes with four, and sometimes even with six.

We have already asked, with the judicious Locke, what is the boundary of distinction between the human and merely animal figure; what is the point of monstrosity at which it would be proper to take your stand against baptizing an infant, against admitting it as a member of the human species, against according to it the possession of a soul? We have seen that this boundary is as difficult to be settled as it is difficult to ascertain what a soul is; for there certainly are none who know what it is but theologians.

Why should the satyrs which St. Jerome saw, the offspring of women and baboons, have been reputed monsters? Might it not be thought, on the contrary, that their lot was in reality happier than ours? Must they not have possessed more strength and more agility? and would they not have laughed at us as an unfortunate race, to whom nature had refused both tails and clothing? A mule, the offspring of two different species; a jumart, the offspring of a bull and a mare; a tarin, the offspring, we are told, of a canary bird and hen linnet – are not monsters.

But how is it that mules, jumarts, and tarins, which are thus produced in nature, do not themselves reproduce? And how do the seminists, ovists, or animalculists, explain, upon their respective theories, the formation of these mongrel productions?

I will tell you plainly, that they do not explain it at all. The seminists never discovered how it is that the ass communicates to his mule offspring a resemblance only in the ears and crupper; the ovists

neither inform us, nor understand how a mare should contain in her egg anything but an animal of her own species. And the animalculists cannot perceive how a minute embryo of an ass could introduce its ears into the matrix of a mare.

The theorist who, in a work entitled the "Philosophy of Venus," maintained that all animals and all monsters are formed by attraction, was still less successful than those just mentioned, in accounting for phenomena so common and yet so surprising.

Alas! my good friends! you none of you know how you originate your own offspring; you are ignorant of the secrets of nature in your own species, and yet vainly attempt to develop them in the mule!

It may, however, be confidently presumed, in reference to a monster by defect, that the whole seminal matter did not reach its destined appropriation; or, perhaps, that the small spermatic worm had lost a portion of its substance; or, perhaps that the egg was crazed and injured. With respect to a monster by excess, you may imagine that some portions of the seminal matter superabounded; that of two spermatic worms united, one could only animate a single member of the animal, and that that member remains in supererogation; that two eggs have blended together, and that one of them has produced but a single member, which was joined to the body of the other.

But what would you say of so many monstrosities arising from the addition of parts of animals of a totally different species? How would you explain a crab on the neck of a girl? or the tail of a rat upon the thigh? or, above all, the four dugs and tail of a cow, which was exhibited at the fair at St. Germain? You would be reduced to the supposition that the unfortunate woman's mother belonged to the very extraordinary family of *Pasiphaë*.

Let each of us boldly and honestly say, How little is it that I really know.

MORALITY

Babblers, preachers, extravagant controversialists! endeavor to remember that your master never announced that the sacrament was the visible sign of an invisible thing; He has nowhere admitted four cardinal virtues, and three divine ones. He has never decided whether His mother came into the world maculate or immaculate. Cease, therefore, to repeat things which never entered into His mind. He has said, in conformity with a truth as ancient as the world – Love God and your neighbor. Abide by that precept, miserable cavillers! Preach morality and nothing more. Observe it, and let the tribunals no longer echo with your prosecutions; snatch no longer, by the claw of an attorney, their morsel of bread from the widow and the orphan. Dispute not concerning some petty benefice with the same fury as the papacy was disputed in the great schism of the West. Monks! place not to the utmost of your power, the universe under contribution, and we may then be able to believe you. I have just read these words in a piece of declamation in fourteen volumes, entitled, "The History of the Lower Empire"; "The Christians had a morality, but the Pagans had none."

Oh, M. Le Beau! author of these fourteen volumes, where did you pick up this absurdity? What becomes of the morality of Socrates, of Zaleucus, of Charondas, of Cicero, of Epictetus, and of Marcus Aurelius?

There is but one morality, M. Le Beau, as there is but one geometry. But you will tell me that the greater part of mankind are ignorant of geometry. True; but if they apply a little to the study of it, all men draw the same conclusions. Agriculturists, manufacturers, artisans, do not go through a regular course of morality; they read neither the "*De Finibus*" of Cicero, nor the "Ethics" of Aristotle; but as soon as they reflect, they are, without knowing it, disciples of Cicero. The Indian dyer, the Tartarian shepherd, and the English seaman, are acquainted with justice and injustice. Confucius did not invent a system of morals, as men construct physical systems. He found his in the hearts of all mankind.

This morality existed in the bosom of the prætor Festus, when the Jews pressed him to put Paul to death for having taken strangers into their temple. "Learn," said he, "that the Romans never condemn any one unheard."

If the Jews were deficient in a moral sense, the Romans were not, and paid it homage.

There is no morality in superstition; it exists not in ceremonies, and has nothing to do with dogmas. We cannot repeat too frequently that dogmas differ, but that morality is the same among all men who make use of their reason. Morality proceeds from God, like light; our superstitions are only darkness. Reflect, reader; pursue the truth, and draw the consequences.

MOSES

SECTION I

Philosophy, of which we sometimes pass the boundaries, researches of antiquity, and the spirit of discussion and criticism, have been carried so far that several learned men have finally doubted if there ever was a Moses, and whether this man was not an imaginary being, such as were Perseus, Bacchus, Atlas, Penthesilea, Vesta, Rhea Silvia, Isis, Sammonocodom, Fo, Mercury, Trismegistus, Odin, Merlin, Francus, Robert the Devil, and so many other heroes of romance whose lives and prowess have been recorded.

It is not very likely, say the incredulous, that a man ever existed whose life is a continual prodigy.

It is not very likely that he worked so many stupendous miracles in Egypt, Arabia, and Syria, without their being known throughout the world.

It is not likely that no Egyptian or Greek writer should have transmitted these miracles to posterity. They are mentioned by the Jews alone; and in the time that this history was written by them, they were not known to any nation – not indeed until towards the second century. The first author who expressly quotes the Book of Moses is Longinus, minister of Queen Zenobia, in the time of the emperor Aurelian.

It is to be remarked that the author of the "*Mercury Trismegistus*," who certainly was an Egyptian, says not a single word about this Moses.

If a single ancient author had related a single one of these miracles, Eusebius would no doubt have triumphed in this evidence, either in his "History" or in his "Evangelical Preparation."

It is true, he mentions authors who have quoted his name, but none who have cited his prodigies. Before him, the Jews, Josephus and Philo, who have so much celebrated their own nation, sought all the writers in which the name of Moses is found, but there was not a single one who made the least mention of the marvellous actions attributed to him.

In this silence of the whole world, the incredulous reason with a temerity which refutes itself.

The Jews are the only people who possessed the Pentateuch, which they attribute to Moses. It is said, even in their books, that this Pentateuch was not known until the reign of their king Josiah, thirty-six years before the destruction and captivity of Jerusalem; and they then only possessed a single copy, which the priest Hilkiah found at the bottom of a strong box, while counting money. The priest sent it to the king by his scribe Shaphan. All this, say they, necessarily obscures the authenticity of the Pentateuch.

In short, if the Pentateuch was known to all the Jews, would Solomon – the wise Solomon, inspired by God Himself to build a temple – have ornamented this temple with so many statues, contrary to the express order of Moses?

All the Jewish prophets, who prophesied in the name of the Lord from the time of Moses till that of King Josiah, would they not have been supported in all their prophecies by the laws of Moses? Would they not a thousand times have quoted his own words? Would they not have commented upon them? None of them, however, quote two lines – no one follows the text of Moses – they even oppose them in several places.

According to these unbelievers, the books attributed to Moses were only written among the Babylonians during the captivity, or immediately afterwards by Esdras. Indeed, we see only Persian and Chaldæan terminations in the Jewish writings: "*Babel*," gate of God; "*Phegor-beel*," or "*Beel-phegor*," god of the precipices; "*Zebuth-beel*," or "*Beel-zebuth*," god of insects; "*Bethel*," house of

God; "*Daniel*," judgment of God; "*Gabriel*," man of God; "*Jahel*," afflicted of God; "*Jael*," the life of God; "*Israel*," seeing God; "*Oviel*," strength of God; "*Raphael*," help of God; "*Uriel*," fire of God.

Thus, all is foreign in the Jewish nation, a stranger itself in Palestine; circumcision, ceremonies, sacrifices, the ark, the cherubim, the goat Hazazel, baptism of justice, simple baptism, proofs, divination, interpretation of dreams, enchantment of serpents – nothing originated among these people, nothing was invented by them.

The celebrated Lord Bolingbroke believed not that Moses ever existed; he thought he saw in the Pentateuch a crowd of contradictions and puzzling chronological and geographical faults; names of towns not then built, precepts given to kings at a time when not only the Jews had no kings, but in which it is probable there were none, since they lived in deserts, in tents, in the manner of the Bedouin Arabs.

What appears to him above all the most palpable contradiction is the gift of forty-eight cities with their suburbs, made to the Levites in a country in which there was not a single village; and it is principally on these forty-eight cities that he refutes Abbadie, and even has the cruelty to treat him with the aversion and contempt of a lord of the Upper Chamber, or a minister of state towards a petty foreign priest who would be so impertinent as to reason with him.

I will take the liberty of representing to Viscount Bolingbroke, and to all those who think with him, not only that the Jewish nation has always believed in the existence of Moses, and in that of his books, but that even Jesus Christ has acknowledged him. The four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, recognize him. St. Matthew says expressly, that Moses and Elias appeared to Jesus Christ on the mountain during the night of the transfiguration, and St. Luke says the same.

Jesus Christ declares in St. Matthew that he is not come to abolish this law, but to accomplish it. In the New Testament, we are often referred to the law of Moses and to the prophets. The whole Church has always believed the Pentateuch written by Moses; and further, of five hundred different societies, which have been so long established in Christendom, none have ever doubted the existence of this great prophet. We must, therefore, submit our reason, as so many men have done before us.

I know very well that I shall gain nothing in the mind of the viscount, or of those of his opinion. They are too well persuaded that the Jewish books were not written until very late, and during the captivity of the two tribes which remained. But we shall possess the consolation of having the Church with us.

SECTION II

If you would be instructed and amused with antiquity, read the life of Moses in the article on "Apocrypha."

In vain have several scholars believed that the Pentateuch could not have been written by Moses. They say that it is affirmed even by the Scripture, that the first known copy was found in the time of King Josiah, and that this single copy was brought to the king by the secretary Shaphan. Now, between the time of Moses and this adventure of the secretary Shaphan, there were one thousand one hundred and sixty-seven years, by the Hebrew computation. For God appeared to Moses in the burning bush, in the year of the world 2213, and the secretary Shaphan published the book of the law in the year of the world 3380. This book found under Josiah, was unknown until the return from the Babylonish captivity; and it is said that it was Esdras, inspired by God, who brought the Holy Scriptures to light.

But whether it was Esdras or another who digested this book is absolutely indifferent, since it is inspired. It is not said in the Pentateuch, that Moses was the author; we might, therefore, be permitted to attribute it to the declaration of some other divine mind, if the Church had not decided that the book is by Moses.

Some opposers add, that no prophet has quoted the books of the Pentateuch, that there is no mention of it either in the Psalms or in the books attributed to Solomon, in Jeremiah or Isaiah, or, in

short, in any canonical book of the Jews. Words answering to those of Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, are not found in any other language recognized by them as authentic. Others, still more bold, have put the following questions:

1. In what language could Moses have written in a savage desert? It could only be in Egyptian; for by this same book we are told that Moses and all his people were born in Egypt. It is therefore probable that they spoke no other language. The Egyptians had yet made no use of papyrus; they engraved hieroglyphics on tables of wood or marble. It is even said, that the tables of the commandments were engraved on polished stones, which required prodigious time and labor.

2. Is it likely, that in a desert where the Jewish people had neither shoemaker nor tailor – in which the God of the universe was obliged to work a continual miracle to preserve the old dresses and shoes of the Jews – men could be found clever enough to engrave the five books of the Pentateuch on marble or wood? You will say, that they found laborers who made a golden calf in one night, and who afterwards reduced the gold into powder – an operation impracticable to common chemistry, which was not yet discovered. Who constructed the tabernacle? Who ornamented thirty columns of brass with capitals of silver? Who wove and embroidered veils of linen with hyacinth, purple, and scarlet? An account that supports the opinion of the contradictors. They answer, that it was not possible that in a desert, where they were in want of everything, for them to perform works so intricate; that they must have begun by making shoes and tunics; that those who wanted necessaries could not indulge in luxuries; and that it is an evident contradiction to say, that they had founders, engravers, and embroiderers, when they had neither clothes nor bread.

3. If Moses had written the first chapter of Genesis, would all young people have been forbidden to read the first chapter? Would so little respect have been paid to the legislator? If it was Moses who said that God punished the iniquity of the fathers to the fourth generation, would Ezekiel have dared to say the contrary?

4. If Moses wrote Leviticus, could he have contradicted it in Deuteronomy? Leviticus forbids a woman to marry her brother, Deuteronomy commands it.

5. Could Moses have spoken of towns which existed not in his time? Would he have said that towns which, in regard to him, were on the east of the Jordan were on the west?

6. Would he have assigned forty-eight cities to the Levites, in a country in which there were never ten, and in a desert in which he had always wandered without habitation?

7. Would he have prescribed rules for the Jewish kings, when not only there were no kings among this people, but they were held in horror, and it was not probable they would ever have any? What! would Moses have given precepts for the conduct of kings who came not until five hundred years after him, and have said nothing in relation to the judges and priests who succeeded him? Does not this religion lead us to believe that the Pentateuch was composed in the time of kings, and that the ceremonies instituted by Moses were only traditional.

8. Suppose he had said to the Jews: I have made you depart to the number of six hundred thousand combatants from the land of Egypt under the protection of your God? Would not the Jews have answered him: You must have been very timid not to lead us against Pharaoh of Egypt; he could not have opposed to us an army of two hundred thousand men. There never was such an army on foot in Egypt; we should have conquered them easily; we should have been the masters of their country. What! has the God, who talks to you, to please us slain all the first-born of Egypt, which, if there were in this country three hundred thousand families, makes three hundred thousand men destroyed in one night, simply to avenge us, and yet you have not seconded your God and given us that fertile country which nothing could withhold from us. On the contrary you have made us depart from Egypt as thieves and cowards, to perish in deserts between mountains and precipices. You might, at least, have conducted us by the direct road to this land of Canaan, to which we have no right, but which you have promised us, and on which we have not yet been able to enter.

It was natural that, from the land of Goshen, we should march towards Tyre and Sidon, along the Mediterranean; but you made us entirely pass the Isthmus of Suez, and re-enter Egypt, proceed as far as Memphis, when we find ourselves at Beel-Sephor on the borders of the Red Sea, turning our backs on the land of Canaan, having journeyed eighty leagues in this Egypt which we wished to avoid, so as at last to nearly perish between the sea and the army of Pharaoh!

If you had wished to deliver us to our enemies, you could not have taken a different route and other measures. God has saved us by a miracle, you say; the sea opened to let us pass; but after such a favor, should He let us die of hunger and fatigue in the horrible deserts of Kadesh-barnea, Mara, Elim, Horeb, and Sinai? All our fathers perished in these frightful solitudes; and you tell us, at the end of forty years, that God took particular care of them.

This is what these murmuring Jews, these unjust children of the vagabonds who died in the desert, might have said to Moses, if he had read Exodus and Genesis to them. And what might they not have said and done on the article of the golden calf? What! you dare to tell us that your brother made a calf for our fathers, when you were with God on the mountain? You, who sometimes tell us that you have spoken to God face to face, and sometimes that you could only see His back! But no matter, you were with this God, and your brother cast a golden calf in one day, and gave it to us to adore it; and instead of punishing your unworthy brother, you make him our chief priest, and order your Levites to slay twenty-three thousand men of your people. Would our fathers have suffered this? Would they have allowed themselves to be sacrificed like so many victims by sanguinary priests? You tell us that, not content with this incredible butchery, you have further massacred twenty-four thousand of our poor followers because one of them slept with a Midianitish woman, whilst you yourself espoused a Midianite; and yet you add, that you are the mildest of men! A few more instances of this mildness, and not a soul would have remained.

No; if you have been capable of all this cruelty, if you can have exercised it, you would be the most barbarous of men, and no punishment would suffice to expiate so great a crime.

These are nearly the objections which all scholars make to those who think that Moses is the author of the Pentateuch. But we answer them, that the ways of God are not those of men; that God has proved, conducted, and abandoned His people by a wisdom which is unknown to us; that the Jews themselves, for more than two thousand years, have believed that Moses is the author of these books; that the Church, which has succeeded the synagogue, and which is equally infallible, has decided this point of controversy; and that scholars should remain silent when the Church pronounces.

SECTION III

We cannot doubt that there was a Moses, a legislator of the Jews. We will here examine his history, following merely the rules of criticism; the Divine is not submitted to similar examination. We must confine ourselves to the probable; men can only judge as men. It is very natural and very probable that an Arab nation dwelt on the confines of Egypt, on the side of Arabia Deserta; that it was tributary or slave to the Egyptian kings, and that afterwards it sought to establish itself elsewhere; but that which reason alone cannot admit is, that this nation, composed of seventy persons at most in the time of Joseph, increased in two hundred and fifteen years, from Joseph to Moses, to the number of six hundred thousand combatants, according to the Book of Exodus, which six hundred thousand men capable of bearing arms imply a multitude of about two millions, counting old men, women, and children. It is not certainly in the course of nature for a colony of seventy persons, as many males as females, to produce in two centuries two millions of inhabitants. The calculations made on this progression by men very little versed in the things of this world, are falsified by the experience of all nations and all times. Children are not made by a stroke of the pen. Reflect well that at this rate a population of ten thousand persons in two hundred years would produce more inhabitants than the globe of the earth could sustain.

Is it any more probable, that these six hundred thousand combatants, favored by the Author of nature who worked for them so many prodigies, were forced to wander in the deserts in which they died, instead of seeking to possess themselves of fertile Egypt?

By these rules of an established and reasonable human criticism, we must agree that it is very likely that Moses conducted a small people from the confines of Egypt. There was among the Egyptians an ancient tradition, related by Plutarch in his "Treatise on Isis and Osiris," that Tiphon, the father of Jerosselaim and Juddecus, fled from Egypt on an ass. It is clear from this passage that the ancestors of the Jews, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, were supposed to have been fugitives from Egypt. A tradition, no less ancient and more general is, that the Jews were driven from Egypt, either as a troop of unruly brigands, or a people infected with leprosy. This double accusation carries its probability even from the land of Goshen, which they had inhabited, a neighboring land of the vagabond Arabs, and where the disease of leprosy, peculiar to the Arabs, might be common. It appears even by the Scripture that this people went from Egypt against their will. The seventeenth chapter of Deuteronomy forbids kings to think of leading the Jews back to Egypt.

The conformity of several Egyptian and Jewish customs still more strengthens the opinion that this people was an Egyptian colony, and what gives it a new degree of probability is the feast of the Passover; that is to say, of the flight or passage instituted in memory of their evasion. This feast alone would be no proof; for among all peoples there are solemnities established to celebrate fabulous and incredible events; such were most of the feasts of the Greeks and Romans; but a flight from one country to another is nothing uncommon, and calls for belief. The proof drawn from this feast of the Passover receives a still greater force by that of the Tabernacles, in memory of the time in which the Jews inhabited the desert on their departure from Egypt. These similitudes, united with so many others, prove that a colony really went from Egypt, and finally established itself for some time at Palestine.

Almost all the rest is of a kind so marvellous that human sagacity cannot digest it. All that we can do is to seek the time in which the history of this flight – that is to say, the Book of Exodus – can have been written, and to examine the opinions which then prevailed; opinions, of which the proof is in the book itself, compared with the ancient customs of nations.

With regard to the books attributed to Moses, the most common rules of criticism permit us not to believe that he can be the author of them.

1. It is not likely that he spoke of the places by names which were not given to them until long afterwards. In this book mention is made of the cities of Jair, and every one agrees that they were not so named until long after the death of Moses. It also speaks of the country of Dan, and the tribe of Dan had not given its name to the country of which it was not yet the master.

2. How could Moses have quoted the book of the wars of the Lord, when these wars and this book were after his time?

3. How could Moses speak of the pretended defeat of a giant named Og, king of Bashan, vanquished in the desert in the last year of his government? And how could he add, that he further saw his bed of iron of nine cubits long in Rabath? This city of Rabath was the capital of the Ammonites, into whose country the Hebrews had not yet penetrated. Is it not apparent, that such a passage is the production of a posterior writer, which his inadvertence betrays? As an evidence of the victory gained over the giant, he brings forward the bed said to be still at Rabath, forgetting that it is Moses whom he makes speak, who was dead long before.

4. How could Moses have called cities beyond the Jordan, which, with regard to him, were on this side? Is it not palpable, that the book attributed to him was written a long time after the Israelites had crossed this little river Jordan, which they never passed under his conduct?

5. Is it likely that Moses told his people, that in the last year of his government he took, in the little province of Argob – a sterile and frightful country of Arabia Petraea – sixty great towns surrounded with high fortified walls, independent of an infinite number of open cities? Is it not much

more probable that these exaggerations were afterwards written by a man who wished to flatter a stupid nation?

6. It is still less likely, that Moses related the miracles with which this history is filled.

It is easy to persuade a happy and victorious people that God has fought for them; but it is not in human nature that a people should believe a hundred miracles in their favor, when all these prodigies ended only in making them perish in a desert. Let us examine some of the miracles related in Exodus.

7. It appears contradictory and injurious to the divine essence to suppose that God, having formed a people to be the sole depository of His laws, and to reign over all nations, should send a man of this people to demand of the king, their oppressor, permission to go into the desert to sacrifice to his God, that this people might escape under the pretence of this sacrifice. Our common ideas cannot forbear attaching an idea of baseness and knavery to this management, far from recognizing the majesty and power of the Supreme Being.

When, immediately after, we read that Moses changed his rod into a serpent, before the king, and turned all the waters of the kingdom into blood; that he caused frogs to be produced which covered the surface of the earth; that he changed all the dust into lice, and filled the air with venomous winged insects; that he afflicted all the men and animals of the country with frightful ulcers; that he called hail, tempests, and thunder, to ruin all the country; that he covered it with locusts; that he plunged it in fearful darkness for three days; that, finally, an exterminating angel struck with death all the first-born of men and animals in Egypt, commencing with the son of the king; again, when we afterwards see his people walking across the Red Sea, the waves suspended in mountains to the right and left, and later falling on the army of Pharaoh, which they swallowed up – when, I say, we read all these miracles, the first idea which comes into our minds is, that this people, for whom God performed such astonishing things, no doubt became the masters of the universe. But, no! the fruit of so many wonders was, that they suffered want and hunger in arid sands; and – prodigy upon prodigy – all died without seeing the little corner of earth in which their descendants afterwards, for some years, established themselves! It is no doubt pardonable if we disbelieve this crowd of prodigies, at the least of which reason so decidedly revolts.

This reason, left to itself, cannot be persuaded that Moses wrote such strange things. How can we make a generation believe so many miracles uselessly wrought for it, and all of which, it is said, were performed in the desert? What being, enjoying divine power, would employ it in preserving the clothes and shoes of these people, after having armed all nature in their favor?

It is therefore very natural to think that all this prodigious history was written a long time after Moses, as the romances of Charlemagne were forged three centuries after him; and as the origins of all nations have not been written until they were out of sight, the imagination has been left at liberty to invent. The more coarse and unfortunate a people are, the more they seek to exalt their ancient history; and what people have been longer miserable, or more barbarous, than the Jews?

It is not to be believed that, when they had not wherewithal to make shoes in their deserts, under the government of Moses, there were any cunning enough to write. We should presume, that the poor creatures born in these deserts did not receive a very brilliant education; and that the nation only began to read and write when it had some commerce with Phoenicia. It was probably in the commencement of monarchy that the Jews, feeling they had some genius, wrote the Pentateuch, and adjusted their traditions. Would they have made Moses recommend kings to read and write his law in a time in which there were no kings? Is it not probable, that the seventeenth chapter of Deuteronomy was composed to moderate the power of royalty; and that it was written by priests in the time of Saul?

It is most likely at this epoch that we must place the digest of the Pentateuch. The frequent slaveries to which this people were subject seem badly calculated to establish literature in a nation, and to render books very common; and the more rare these books were in the commencement, the more the authors ventured to fill them with miracles.

The Pentateuch, attributed to Moses, is, no doubt, very ancient; if it was put in order in the time of Saul and Solomon, it was about the time of the Trojan war, and is one of the most curious monuments of the manner of thinking of that time. We see that all known nations, in proportion to their ignorance, were fond of prodigies. All was then performed by celestial ministry in Egypt, Phrygia, Greece, and Asia.

The authors of the Pentateuch give us to understand that every nation has its gods, and that these gods have all nearly an equal power.

If Moses, in the name of God, changed his rod into a serpent, the priests of Pharaoh did as much; if he changed all the waters of Egypt into blood, even to that which was in the vases, the priests immediately performed the same prodigy, without our being able to conceive on what waters they performed this metamorphosis; at least, unless they expressly created new waters for the purpose. The Jewish writers prefer being reduced to this absurdity, rather than allow us to suspect that the gods of Egypt had not the power of changing water into blood as well as the God of Jacob.

But when the latter fills the land of Egypt with lice, changing all the dust into them, His entire superiority appears; the magi cannot imitate it, and they make the God of the Jews speak thus: "Pharaoh shall know that nothing is equal to me." These words put into his mouth, merely mark a being who believes himself more powerful than his rivals; he was equalled in the metamorphosis of a rod into a serpent, and in that of the waters into blood; but he gains the victory in the article of the lice and the following miracles.

This idea of the supernatural power of priests of all countries is displayed in several places of Scripture. When Balaam, the priest of the little state of a petty king, named Balak, in the midst of deserts, is near cursing the Jews, their God appears to him to prevent him. It seems that the malediction of Balaam was much to be feared. To restrain this priest, it is not enough that God speaks to him, he sends before him an angel with a sword, and speaks Himself again by the mouth of his ass. All these precautions certainly prove the opinion which then prevailed, that the malediction of a priest, whatever it was, drew fatal consequences after it.

This idea of a God superior to other gods, though He made heaven and earth, was so rooted in all minds, that Solomon in his last prayer cries: "Oh, my God! there is no other god like thee in earth or heaven." It is this opinion which rendered the Jews so credulous respecting the sorceries and enchantments of other nations.

It is this which gave rise to the story of the Witch of Endor, who had the power of invoking the shade of Saul. Every people had their prodigies and oracles, and it never even came into the minds of any nations to doubt the miracles and prophecies of others. They were contented with opposing similar arms; it seems as if the priests, in denying the prodigies of other nations, feared to discredit their own. This kind of theology prevailed a long time over all the earth.

It is not for us to enter here on the detail of all that is written on Moses. We speak of his laws in more than one place in this work. We will here confine ourselves to remarking how much we are astonished to see a legislator inspired by God; a prophet, through whom God Himself speaks, proposing to us no future life. There is not a single word in Leviticus, which can lead us to suspect the immortality of the soul. The reply to this overwhelming difficulty is, that God proportioned Himself to the ignorance of the Jews. What a miserable answer! It was for God to elevate the Jews to necessary knowledge – not to lower Himself to them. If the soul is immortal, if there are rewards and punishments in another life, it is necessary for men to be informed of it. If God spoke, He must have informed them of this fundamental dogma. What legislator, what god but this, proposes to his people wine, oil, and milk alone! What god but this always encourages his believers, as a chief of robbers encourages his troops, with the hope of plunder only! Once more; it is very pardonable for mere human reason simply to see, in such a history, the barbarous stupidity of the first ages of a savage people. Man, whatever he does, cannot reason otherwise; but if God really is the author of the Pentateuch, we must submit without reasoning.

MOTION

A philosopher, in the neighborhood of Mount Krapak, argued with me that motion is essential to matter.

"Everything moves," says he; "the sun continually revolves on its own axis; the planets do the same, and every planet has many different motions; everything is a sieve; everything passes through a sieve; the hardest metal is pierced with an infinity of pores, by which escapes a constant torrent of vapors that circulate in space. The universe is nothing but motion; motion, therefore, is essential to matter."

"But, sir," said I to him, "might not any one say, in answer to what you have advanced: This block of marble, this cannon, this house, this motion, are not in motion; therefore motion is not essential?"

"They do move," he replied; "they move in space together with the earth by the common motion, and they move so incontestably – although insensibly – by their own peculiar motion, that, at the expiration of an indefinite number of centuries, there will remain not a single atom of the masses which now constitute them, from which particles are detaching themselves every passing moment."

"But, my good sir, I can conceive matter to be in a state of rest; motion, therefore, cannot be considered essential to it."

"Why, certainly, it must be of vast consequence whether you conceive it to be, or conceive it not to be, in a state of rest. I still repeat, that it is impossible for it to be so."

"This is a bold assertion; but what, let me ask you, will you say to chaos?"

"Oh, chaos! If we were inclined to talk about chaos, I should tell you that all was necessarily in motion, and that 'the breath of God moved upon the waters'; that the element of water was recognized in existence, and that the other elements existed also; that, consequently, fire existed; that there cannot be fire without motion, that motion is essential to fire. You will not succeed much with chaos."

"Alas! who can succeed with all these subjects of dispute? But, as you are so very fully acquainted with these things, I must request you to inform me why one body impels another: whether it is because matter is impenetrable, or because two bodies cannot be together in one place; or because, in every case of every description, the weak is driven before the strong?"

"Your last reason is rather more facetious than philosophical. No person has hitherto been able to discover the cause of the communication of motion."

"That, however, does not prevent its being essential to matter. No one has ever been able to discover the cause of sensation in animals; yet this sensation is so essential to them, that, if you exclude the idea of it, you no longer have the idea of an animal."

"Well, I will concede to you, for a moment, that motion is essential to matter – just for a moment, let it be remembered, for I am not much inclined to embroil myself with the theologians – and now, after this admission, tell me how one ball produces motion in another?"

"You are very curious and inquisitive; you wish me to inform you of what no philosopher ever knew."

"It appears rather curious, and even ludicrous, that we should know the laws of motion, and yet be profoundly ignorant of the principle of the communication of motion!"

"It is the same with everything else; we know the laws of reasoning, but we know not what it is in us that reasons. The ducts through which our blood and other animal fluids pass are very well known to us, but we know not what forms that blood and those fluids. We are in life, but we know not in what the vital principle consists."

"Inform me, however, at least, whether, if motion be essential to matter, there has not always existed the same quantity of motion in the world?"

"That is an old chimera of Epicurus revived by Descartes. I do not, for my own part, see that this equality of motion in the world is more necessary than an equality of triangles. It is essential that a triangle should have three angles and three sides, but it is not essential that the number of triangles on this globe should be always equal."

"But is there not always an equality of forces, as other philosophers express it?"

"That is a similar chimera. We must, upon such a principle, suppose that there is always an equal number of men, and animals, and moving beings, which is absurd."

By the way, what, let me ask, is the force of a body in motion? It is the product of its quantity multiplied by its velocity in a given time. Calling the quantity of a body four, and its velocity four, the force of its impulse will be equal to sixteen. Another quantity we will assume to be two, and its velocity two; the force with which that impels is as four. This is the grand principle of mechanics. Leibnitz decidedly and pompously pronounced the principle defective. He maintained that it was necessary to measure that force, that product, by the quantity multiplied by the square of the velocity. But this was mere captious sophistry and chicanery, an ambiguity unworthy of a philosopher, founded on an abuse of the discovery of the great Galileo, that the spaces traversed with a motion uniformly accelerated were, to each other, as the squares of the times and velocities.

Leibnitz did not consider the time which he should have considered. No English mathematician adopted his system. It was received for a while by a small number of geometers in France. It pervaded some books, and even the philosophical institutions of a person of great celebrity. Maupertuis is very abusive of Mairan, in a little work entitled "A, B, C"; as if he thought it necessary to teach the *a, b, c*, of science to any man who followed the old and, in fact, the true system of calculation. Mairan was, however, in the right. He adhered to the ancient measurement, that of the quantity multiplied by the velocity. He gradually prevailed over his antagonists, and his system recovered its former station; the scandal of mathematics disappeared, and the quackery of the square of the velocity was dismissed at last to the extramundane spaces, to the limbo of vanity, together with the monads which Leibnitz supposed to constitute the concentric mirror of nature, and also with his elaborate and fanciful system of "pre-established harmony."

MOUNTAIN

The fable of the mountain which, after alarming the whole neighborhood with its outcries in labor, was ridiculed by all present when it became delivered of a mouse, is at once ancient and universal. The company, however, who thus gave way to ridicule were not a company of philosophers. Those who mocked should in reality have admired. A mountain's being delivered of a mouse was an event as extraordinary, and as worthy of admiration, as a mouse's being delivered of a mountain. A rock's producing a rat is a case absolutely prodigious, and the world never beheld anything approaching to such a miracle. All the worlds in the universe could not originate a fly. Thus, in cases where the vulgar mock, the philosopher admires; and where the vulgar strain their eyes in stupid astonishment, he often smiles.

NAIL

We only ask here from the censors of books, permission to transcribe from that which the Dominican missionary Labat, proveditor of the holy office, has written concerning the nails of the cross, into which it is more than probable no nails were ever driven.

"The Italian priest who conducted us had sufficient interest to get us, among other things, a sight of the nails with which our Saviour was fastened to the cross. They appeared to me very different from those which the Benedictines show at St. Denis. Possibly those belonging to St. Denis served for the feet, and the others for the hands. It was necessary that those for the hands should be sufficiently large and strong to support all the weight of the body. However, the Jews must either have made use of more than four nails, or some of those which are shown to the faithful are not genuine. History relates that St. Helena threw one of them into the sea, to appease a furious tempest which assailed the ship in which she had embarked. Constantine made use of another, to make a bit for the bridle of his horse. One is shown entire at St. Denis in France; another also entire at the Holy Cross of Jerusalem at Rome. A very celebrated Roman author of our day asserts that the iron crown with which they crown the emperors in Italy was made out of one of these nails. We are shown at Rome and at Carpentras two bridle bits also made of these nails, not to mention more at other places. To be sure, several of them are discreet enough to say, that it is the head or point only of these nails which they exhibit."

The missionary speaks in the same tone of all the relics. He observes in the same passage, that when the body of the first deacon, St. Stephen, was brought from Jerusalem to Rome, in 557, and placed in the tomb of the deacon of St. Lawrence: "St. Lawrence made way of himself to give the right hand to his predecessor; an action which procured him the name of the civil Spaniard."

Upon this passage we venture only one reflection, which is, that if some philosopher had said as much, in the "Encyclopædia", as the Dominican Labat, a crowd of Pantouillets, Nonnottes, Chiniacs, Chaumeix, and other knaves, would have exclaimed – Deist, atheist, and geometrician! According to circumstances things change their names.

*Selon ce que l'on peut être
Les choses changent de nom.*

– Amphytrion, Prologue.

NATURE

Dialogue Between The Philosopher And Nature

PHILOSOPHER

What are you, Nature? I live in you? but I have been searching for you for fifty years, and have never yet been able to find you.

NATURE

The ancient Egyptians, whose lives it is said extended to twelve hundred years, attached the same reproach to me. They called me Isis; they placed a thick veil over my head; and they said that no one could ever raise it.

PHILOSOPHER

It is on that account that I apply directly to yourself. I have been able to measure some of your globes, to ascertain their courses, and to point out the laws of motion; but I have never been able to ascertain what you are yourself.

Are you always active? Are you always passive? Do your elements arrange themselves, as water places itself over sand, oil over water, and air over oil? Have you a mind which directs all your operations – as councils are inspired as soon as they meet, although the individual members composing them are often ignorant? Explain to me, I entreat, the enigma in which you are enveloped.

NATURE

I am the great universal system. I know nothing farther. I am no mathematician, and yet everything in and about me is arranged agreeably to mathematical laws. Conjecture, if you can, how all this is effected.

PHILOSOPHER

Certainly, since your great universal system knows nothing of mathematics, and yet the laws by which you are regulated are those of the most profound geometry, there must necessarily be an eternal geometrician, who directs you, and presides over your operations.

NATURE

You are perfectly right; I am water, earth, fire, air, metal, mineral, stone, vegetable, and animal. I clearly perceive that there is an intelligence in me: you possess an intelligence, although you see it not. Neither do I see mine; I feel this invisible power; I am unable to know it: why should you, who are only a very minute portion of myself, be anxious to know what I myself am ignorant of?

PHILOSOPHER

We are curious. I should be pleased to learn how it is, that while so rough and coarse in your mountains, and deserts, and seas, you are at the same time so ingenious and finished in your animals and vegetables?

NATURE

My poor child, shall I tell you the real truth? I have had bestowed upon me a name that does not at all suit me: I am called nature, while I am all art.

PHILOSOPHER

That word deranges all my ideas. What! is it possible that nature should be nothing but art.

NATURE

It is undoubtedly the case. Do you not know that there is infinite art in those seas and mountains which you represent as so rough and so coarse? Do you not know that all those waters gravitate towards the centre of the earth, and are raised only by immutable laws; and that those mountains which crown the earth are immense reservoirs of eternal snows, incessantly producing the fountains, lakes, and rivers, without which my animal and vegetable off-spring would inevitably perish? And, with respect to what are denominated my animal, vegetable, and mineral kingdoms, constituting thus only three kingdoms, be assured that I have in fact millions of them. But if you consider the formation of an insect, of an ear of corn, of gold, or of copper, all will exhibit to you prodigies of art.

PHILOSOPHER

It is undoubtedly true. The more I reflect on the subject, the more clearly I perceive that you are only the art of some Great Being, extremely powerful and skilful, who conceals Himself and exhibits you. All the reasoners, from the time of Thales, and probably long before him, have been playing at hide and seek with you. They have said, "I have hold of you"; and they in fact held nothing. We all resemble Ixion: he thought he embraced Juno, when he embraced only a cloud.

NATURE

Since I am the whole that exists, how is it possible for a being like you, so small a portion of myself, to comprehend me? Be contented, my dear little atomic children, with seeing a few particles that surround you, with drinking a few drops of my milk, with vegetating for a few moments in my bosom, and at last dying without any knowledge of your mother and your nurse.

PHILOSOPHER

My beloved mother, pray tell me a little why you exist – why anything has existed?

NATURE

I will answer you in the language in which I always have answered, for so long a series of ages, those who have interrogated me on the subject of first principles: "I know nothing at all about the matter."

PHILOSOPHER

Nothing itself, would it not be preferable to that multitude of existences formed to be continually dissolved; those tribes of animals born and reproduced to devour others, and devoured in their turn; those numberless beings endued with sensation, and formed to experience so many sensations of pain; and those other tribes of reasoning beings which never, or at least only rarely, listen to reason? For what purpose, Nature, was all this?

NATURE

Oh! pray go and inquire of Him who made me.

NECESSARY – NECESSITY

OSMIN

Do you not assert that everything is necessary?

SELIM

If all be not necessary, it follows that God does unnecessary things.

OSMIN

That is to say, it was necessary for the Divine Nature to do what it has done.

SELIM

I believe, or at least I suspect so. There are men who think differently. I do not understand them; but possibly they are right. I fear to dispute on this subject.

OSMIN

It is, however, necessary for me to talk to you upon it.

SELIM

In what manner? Would you speak of what is necessary to sustain life, or the evil to which people are reduced who cannot procure it?

OSMIN

No; for that which is necessary to one is not always necessary to another. It is necessary for an Indian to possess rice, for an Englishman to eat animal food, as Russians must wear furs, and Africans gauze. One man believes that he has need of a dozen coach-horses, another limits himself to a pair of shoes, and a third walks gayly on his bare feet. I wish to speak to you of that which is necessary to all men.

SELIM

It appears to me that God has given us all that is necessary in this sense: eyes to see, feet to walk, a mouth to eat, a gullet to swallow, a stomach to digest, a brain to reason, and organs to produce our kind.

OSMIN

How happens it then that men are sometimes born who are deprived of a part of these necessary faculties?

SELIM

Because the general laws of nature are liable to accidents which produce monsters; but in general man is provided with all things necessary to his existence in society.

OSMIN

Are there not notions common to all men necessary to this purpose?

SELIM

Yes; I have travelled with Paul Lucas, and wherever I went I saw that man respected his father and mother; that he thought himself bound to keep his promise; that he pitied oppressed innocence; that he detested persecution; that he regarded freedom of thinking as a right of nature, and the enemies of that freedom as the enemies of the human race. They who think differently appear to me to be badly organized, and monsters, like those who are born without eyes or heads.

OSMIN

These necessary things – are they necessary in all times, and in all places?

SELIM

Yes: otherwise they would not be necessary to human kind.

OSMIN

Therefore, a new creed is not necessary to mankind. Men could live in society, and perform all their duties towards God, before they believed that Mahomet had frequent conversations with the angel Gabriel.

SELIM

Nothing is more evident; it would be ridiculous to think that man could not perform his duties until Mahomet came into the world. It was no way necessary for men to believe the Koran. The world went on before the appearance of Mahomet, precisely as at present. If Mahometanism was necessary to the world, it would exist everywhere. God, who has given us two eyes to see the sun, would have bestowed upon us some means of discovering the truths of the Mahometan religion. That sect therefore resembles the arbitrary laws which change according to times and places, like fashions or the theories of physicians, which displace and succeed one another. The Mahometan religion cannot therefore be essentially necessary to man.

OSMIN

But since it exists, God has permitted it.

SELIM

Yes, as He permits all the world to abound in absurdities, errors, and calamities. This is not saying that men were absolutely created in order to be foolish and unhappy. God permits some men to be eaten by serpents, but we ought not to say that God made man to be eaten by serpents.

OSMIN

What do you mean by saying that God permits? Can anything happen but by His orders? To permit and to will – are they not with Him the same thing?

SELIM

He permits crime, but does not commit it.

OSMIN

To commit a crime is to act against Divine justice – to disobey God. Therefore, as God cannot disobey Himself, He cannot commit crime; but He has so made man that man commits it frequently. How does that arise?

SELIM

Some men can tell, but I am not one of them. All that I know is, that the Koran is ridiculous, although possessing here and there things which are passable. The Koran, however, is certainly not necessary to man – that I maintain. I perceive clearly that which is false, but know very little of that which is true.

OSMIN

I thought that you would instruct me, but you teach me nothing.

SELIM

Is it not something to know the men who deceive you, and the gross and dangerous errors they promulgate?

OSMIN

I should have cause to complain of a physician who made me acquainted with poisonous plants, without instructing me in regard to such as are salutary.

SELIM

I am no physician, nor are you a sick man; and it appears to me that I give you a very useful prescription, when I say to you: Distrust the inventions of charlatans; worship God; be an honest man; and believe that two and two make four.

NEW – NOVELTIES

It seems as if the first words of Ovid's "Metamorphoses" – "*In nova fert animus*" – were the emblem of mankind. No one is touched with the admirable spectacle of the sun which rises or seems to rise every day; but everybody runs at the smallest meteor which appears for a moment in the map of vapors which surround the earth, and which we call heaven. We despise whatever is common, or which has been long known:

Vilia sunt nobis quaecumque prioribus annis
Vidimus, et sordet quidquid spectavimus olim.

A hawker will not burden himself with a "Virgil" or a "Horace," but with a new book, were it ever so detestable. He draws you aside and says to you: "Sir, will you have some books from Holland?"

From the commencement of the world, women have complained of the infidelities done to them in favor of the first new object which presents itself, and which has often this novelty for its only merit. Several ladies – we must confess it, notwithstanding the infinite respect which we have for them – have treated men as they complain that the men have treated them; and the story of Jocondo is much more ancient than Ariosto.

Perhaps this universal taste for novelty is a benefit of nature. We are told: Content yourselves with what you have; desire nothing beyond your situation; subdue the restlessness of your mind. These are very good maxims; but if we had followed them, we should still live upon acorns and sleep under the stars, and we should have had neither Corneille, Racine, Molière, Poussin, Le Brun, Lemoine, nor Pigal.

NUDITY

Why do we shut up a man or a woman whom we find naked in the streets? and why is no one offended at entirely naked statues, and with certain paintings of Jesus and of Magdalen which are to be seen in some of the churches? It is very likely that human beings existed for a considerable time without clothing. In more than one island and on the continent of America, people are still found who are ignorant of clothing.

The most civilized of them conceal the organs of generation by leaves, by interlaced rushes or mats, and by feathers. Whence this latter modesty? Is it the instinct of nature to provoke desire by the concealment of that which we are inclined to discover? Is it true that among nations somewhat more polished than the Jews and demi-Jews, there are entire sects who, when they worship God, deprive themselves of clothing. Such have been, it is said, the Adamites and the Abelians. They assembled, naked, to sing the praises of God. St. Epiphanius and St. Augustine say this, who, it is true, were not contemporaries, and who lived very distant from their country. But after all, this folly is possible, and is not more extraordinary or insane than a hundred other follies which have made the tour of the world, one after another.

We have seen, in the article "Emblem", that the Mahometans still possess saints who are mad, and who go about naked as apes. It is very possible that crazy people have existed, who thought that it was more proper to present ourselves before the Deity in the state in which He has formed us, than under any disguise of our own invention. It is possible that these persons exposed themselves out of pure devotion. There are so few well-made people of either sex, that nudity may have inspired chastity, or rather disgust, instead of augmenting desire.

It is moreover asserted that the Abelians renounced marriage. If they abounded in youthful gallants and amorous maidens, they were the less comparable with St. Adhelm and the happy Robert D'Arbrissele, who lay with the most beautiful women, only in order to prove the strength of their continence. I confess, however, that it must be pleasant to witness a hundred naked Helens and Parisés singing anthems, giving one another the kiss of peace, and performing the ceremonies of the agapæ.

All this proves that there is nothing so singular, so extravagant, or so superstitious, which has not been conceived by the head of man. Happy it is, when these follies do not trouble society, and make of it a scene of hate, of discord, and of fury. It is doubtless better to pray to God stark naked, than to soil His altars and the public places with human blood.

NUMBER

Was Euclid right in defining number to be a collection of unities of the same kind? When Newton says that number is an abstract relation of one quantity to another of the same kind, does he not understand by that the use of numbers in arithmetic and geometry? Wolfe says, number is that which has the same relation with unity as one right line has with another. Is not this rather a property attributed to a number, than a definition? If I dared, I would simply define numbers the idea of several unities.

I see white – I have a sensation, an idea of white. It signifies not whether these two things are or are not of the same species; I can reckon two ideas. I see four men and four horses – I have the idea of eight; in like manner, three stones and six trees will give me the idea of nine.

That I add, multiply, subtract, and divide these, are operations of the faculty of thought which I have received from the master of nature; but they are not properties inherent to number. I can square three and cube it, but there is not certainly in nature any number which can be squared or cubed. I very well conceive what an odd or even number is, but I can never conceive either a perfect or an imperfect one.

Numbers can have nothing by themselves. What properties, what virtue, can ten flints, ten trees, ten ideas, possess because they are ten? What superiority will one number divisible in three even parts have over another divisible in two?

Pythagoras was the first, it is said, who discovered divine virtue in numbers. I doubt whether he was the first; for he had travelled in Egypt, Babylon, and India, and must have related much of their arts and knowledge. The Indians particularly, the inventors of the combined and complicated game of chess, and of ciphers, so convenient that the Arabs learned of them, through whom they have been communicated to us after so many ages – these same Indians, I say, joined strange chimeras to their sciences. The Chaldæans had still more, and the Egyptians more still. We know that self-delusion is in our nature. Happy is he who can preserve himself from it! Happy is he who, after having some access of this fever of the mind, can recover tolerable health.

Porphyrius, in the "Life of Pythagoras," says that the number 2 is fatal. We might say, on the contrary, that it is the most favorable of all. Woe to him that is always single! Woe to nature, if the human species and that of animals were not often two and two!

If 2 was of bad augury, 3, by way of recompense, was admirable, and 4 was divine; but the Pythagoreans and their imitators forgot that this mysterious 4, so divine, was composed of twice that diabolical number 2! Six had its merit, because the first statuaries divided their figures into six modules. We have seen that, according to the Chaldæans, God created the world in six *gahambars*; but 7 was the most marvellous number; for there were at first but seven planets, each planet had its heaven, and that made seven heavens, without anyone knowing what was meant by the word heaven.

All Asia reckoned seven days for a week. We divide the life of man into seven ages. How many reasons have we in favor of this number!

The Jews in time collected some scraps of this philosophy. It passed among the first Christians of Alexandria with the dogmas of Plato. It is principally displayed in the "Apocalypse of Cerinthus," attributed to John the Apostle.

We see a striking example of it in the number of the beast: "That no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name. Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is six hundred three score and six."

We know what great pains all the great scholars have taken to divine the solution of this enigma. This number, composed of three times two at each figure, does it signify three times fatal to the third power? There were two beasts, and we know not yet of which the author would speak.

We have seen that Bossuet, less happy in arithmetic than in funeral orations, has demonstrated that Diocletian is the beast, because we find the Roman figures 666 in the letters of his name, by cutting off those which would spoil this operation. But in making use of Roman figures, he does not remember that the Apocalypse was written in Greek. An eloquent man may fall into this mistake. The power of numbers was much more respected among us when we knew nothing about them.

You may observe, my dear reader, in the article on "Figure," some fine allegories that Augustine, bishop of Hippo, extracted from numbers.

This taste subsisted so long, that it triumphed at the Council of Trent. We preserve its mysteries, called "Sacraments" in the Latin church, because the Dominicans, with Soto at their head, allege that there are seven things which contribute to life, seven planets, seven virtues, seven mortal sins, six days of creation and one of repose, which make seven; further, seven plagues of Egypt, seven beatitudes; but unfortunately the fathers forget that Exodus reckons ten plagues, and that the beatitudes are to the number of eight in St. Matthew and four in St. Luke. But scholars have overcome this difficulty; by retrenching from St. Matthew the four beatitudes of St. Luke, there remain six, and add unity to these six, and you will have seven. Consult Fra Paolo Sarpi, in the second book of his history of the County of Trent.

NUMBERING

SECTION I

The most ancient numberings that history has left us are those of the Israelites, which are indubitable, since they are extracted from the Jewish books. We believe that we must not reckon as a numbering the flight of the Israelites to the number of six hundred thousand men on foot, because the text specifies them not tribe by tribe; it adds, that an innumerable troop of people gathered together and joined them. This is only a relation.

The first circumstantial numbering is that which we see in the book of the "Viedaber," which we call Numbers. By the reckoning which Moses and Aaron made of the people in the desert, we find, in counting all the tribes except that of Levi, six hundred and three thousand five hundred and fifty men capable of bearing arms; and if we add the tribe of Levi, supposing it equal in number to the others, the strong with the weak, we shall have six hundred and fifty-three thousand nine hundred and thirty-five men, to which we must add an equal number of old women and children, which will compose two millions six hundred and fifteen thousand seven hundred and forty-two persons, who departed from Egypt.

When David, after the example of Moses, ordered the numbering of all the people, he found eight hundred thousand warriors of the tribes of Israel, and five hundred thousand of that of Judah, according to the Book of Kings; but according to Chronicles they reckoned eleven hundred thousand warriors in Israel; and less than five hundred thousand in Judah.

The Book of Kings formally excludes Levi and Benjamin, and counts them not. If therefore we join these two tribes to the others in their proportion, the total of the warriors will amount to nineteen hundred and twenty thousand. This is a great number for the little country of Judæa, the half of which is composed of frightful rocks and caverns: but it was a miracle.

It is not for us to enter into the reasons for which the Sovereign Arbiter of kings and people punished David for an operation which he himself commanded to Moses. It still less becomes us to seek why God, being irritated against David, punished the people for being numbered. The prophet Gad ordered the king on the part of God to choose war, famine, or pestilence. David accepted the pestilence, and seventy thousand Jews died of it in three days.

St. Ambrosius, in his book of "Repentance," and St. Augustine in his book against Faustus, acknowledged that pride and ambition led David to make this calculation. Their opinion is of great weight, and we can certainly submit to their decision by extinguishing all the deceitful lights of our own minds.

Scripture relates a new numbering in the time of Esdras, when the Jewish nation returned from captivity. "All this multitude (say equally Esdras and Nehemiah, being as one man) amounted to forty-two thousand three hundred and sixty persons." They were all named by families, and they counted the number of Jews of each family, and the number of priests. But in these two authors there are not only differences between the numbers and the names of families, but we further see an error of calculation in both. By the calculation of Esdras, instead of forty-two thousand men, after computation we find but twenty-nine thousand eight hundred and eighteen; and by that of Nehemiah we find thirty-one thousand and eighty-nine.

We must consult the commentators on this apparent mistake, particularly Dom Calmet, who adding to one of these calculations what is wanting to the other, and further adding what is wanted to both of them, solves all the difficulty. To the computations of Esdras and Nehemiah, as reckoned by Calmet, are wanting ten thousand seven hundred and seventy-seven persons; but we find them in

families which could not give their genealogy; besides, if there were any fault of the copyist, it could not destroy the veracity of the divinely inspired text.

It is to be believed that the great neighboring kings of Palestine made numberings of their people as frequently as possible. Herodotus gives us the amount of all those who followed Xerxes, without including his naval forces. He reckons seventeen hundred thousand men, and he pretends, that to arrive at this computation, they were sent in divisions of ten thousand into a place which would only hold this number of men closely crowded. This method is very faulty, for by crowding a little less, each division of ten thousand might easily contain only from eight to nine. Further, this method is not at all soldier-like, and it would have been much more easy to have counted the whole by making the soldiers march in rank and file.

It should further be observed, how difficult it was to support seventeen hundred thousand men in the country of Greece, which they went to conquer. We may very well doubt of this number, and the manner of reckoning it; of the whipping given to the Hellespont; and of the sacrifice of a thousand oxen made to Minerva by a Persian king, who knew her not, and who adored the sun alone as the only emblem of the Divinity. Besides, the numbering of seventeen hundred thousand men is not complete, even by the confession of Herodotus, since Xerxes further carried with him all the people of Thrace and Macedonia, whom he forced, he says, to follow him, apparently the sooner to starve his army. We should therefore do here what all wise men do in reading ancient, and even modern histories – suspend our judgment and doubt much.

The first numbering which we have of a profane nation is that made by Servius Tullius, the sixth king of Rome. He found, says Titus Livius, eighty thousand combatants, all Roman citizens: that implies three hundred and twenty thousand citizens at least, as many old people, women and children, to which we must add at least twenty thousand domestics, slaves and freemen.

Now we may reasonably doubt whether the little Roman state contained this number. Romulus only reigned (if we may call him king) over about three thousand bandits, assembled in a little town between the mountains. This town was the worst land of Italy. The circuit of all his country was not three thousand paces. Servius was the sixth chief or king of this rising people. The rule of Newton, which is indubitable for elective kingdoms, gives twenty-one years' reign to each king, and by that contradicts all the ancient historians, who have never observed the order of time, nor given any precise date. The five kings of Rome must have reigned about a hundred years.

It is certainly not in the order of nature that an ungrateful soil, which was not five leagues in length or three in breadth, and which must have lost many of its inhabitants in its almost continual little wars, could be peopled with three hundred and forty thousand souls. There is not half the number in the same territory at present, when Rome is the metropolis of the Christian world; when the affluence of foreigners and the ambassadors of so many nations must serve to people the towns; when gold flows from Poland, Hungary, half of Germany, Spain, and France, by a thousand channels into the purse of the treasury, and must further facilitate population, if other causes intercept it.

As the history of Rome was not written until more than five hundred years after its foundation, it would not be at all surprising if the historians had liberally given Servius Tullius eighty thousand warriors instead of eight thousand, through false zeal for their country. Their zeal would have been much more judicious if they had confessed the weak commencement of their republic. It is much more noble to be raised from so poor an origin to so much greatness, than to have had double the soldiers of Alexander to conquer about fifteen leagues of country in four hundred years.

The census was never taken except of Roman citizens. It is pretended that under Augustus it amounted to four millions one hundred and thirty-seven thousand in the year 29 before our vulgar era, according to Tillemont, who is very exact, and Dion Cassius, who is no less so.

Lawrence Echard admits but one numbering, of four millions one hundred and thirty-seven thousand men, in the year 14 of our era. The same Echard speaks of a general numbering of the

empire for the first year of the same era; but he quotes no Roman author, nor specifies any calculation of the number of citizens. Tillemont does not speak in any way of this numbering.

We have quoted Tacitus and Suetonius, but to very little purpose. The census of which Suetonius speaks is not a numbering of citizens; it is only a list of those to whom the public furnished corn. Tacitus only speaks, in book ii., of a census established among the Gauls, for the purpose of raising more tribute on each head. Augustus never made a calculation of the other subjects of his empire, because they paid not the poll-tax, which he wished to establish in Gaul.

Tacitus says that Augustus had a memoir, written in his own hand, which contained the revenues of the empire, the fleets and contributory kingdoms. He speaks not of any numbering. Dion Cassius speaks of a census, but he specifies no number.

Josephus, in his "Antiquities," says that in the year 759 of Rome – the time answering to the eleventh year of our era – Cyrenius, then constituted governor of Syria, caused a list to be made of all the property of the Jews, which caused a revolt. This has no relation to a general numbering, and merely proves that this Cyrenius was not governor of Judæa – which was then a little province of Syria – until ten years after, and not at the birth of our Saviour.

These seem to me to be all the principal passages that we can collect in profane histories, touching the numberings attributed to Augustus. If we refer to them, Jesus Christ would be born under the government of Varus, and not under that of Cyrenius; and there could have been no universal numbering. But St. Luke, whose authority should prevail over that of Josephus, Suetonius, Tacitus, Dion Cassius, and all the writers of Rome – St. Luke affirms positively that there was a universal numbering of all the earth, and that Cyrenius was governor of Judæa. We must therefore refer solely to him, without even seeking to reconcile him with Flavius Josephus, or with any other historian. As to the rest, neither the New nor the Old Testament has been given to us to enlighten points of history, but to announce salutary truths, before which all events and opinions should vanish. It is thus that we always reply to the false calculations, contradictions, absurdities, enormous faults of geography, chronology, physics, and even common sense, with which philosophers tell us the Holy Scripture is filled; we cease not to reply that there is here no question of reason, but of faith and piety.

SECTION II

With regard to the numbers of the moderns, kings fear not at present that a doctor Gad should propose to them on the part of God, either famine, war, or pestilence, to punish them for wishing to know the amount of their subjects. None of them know it. We conjecture and guess, and always possibly within a few millions of men.

I have carried the number of inhabitants which compose the empire of Russia to twenty-four millions, in the statements which have been sent to me; but I have not guaranteed this valuation, because I know very little about it. I believe that Germany possessed as many people, reckoning the Hungarians. If I am deceived by one or two millions, we know it is a trifle in such a case.

I beg pardon of the King of Spain, if I have only awarded him seven millions of subjects in our continent. It is a very small number; but Don Ustaris, employed in the ministry, gives him no more. We reckon from about nine to ten millions of free beings in the three kingdoms of Great Britain. In France we count between sixteen and twenty millions. This is a proof that Doctor Gad has nothing wherewith to reproach the ministry of France.

As to the capital towns, opinions are further divided. According to some calculators, Paris has seven hundred thousand inhabitants, and according to others five hundred thousand. It is thus with London, Constantinople, and Grand Cairo.

As to the subjects of the pope, they will make a crowd in paradise, but the multitude is moderate on earth. Why so? – because they are subjects of the pope. Would Cato the Censor have ever believed the Romans would come to that pass?

OCCULT QUALITIES

Occult qualities have for a very long time been much derided; it would be more proper to deride those who do not believe in them. Let us for the hundredth time repeat that every principle, every primitive source of any of the works which come from the hand of the *demiourgos*, is occult, and eternally hidden from mortals.

What is the centripetal force, the force of gravitation, which acts without contact at such immense distances? What causes our hearts to beat sixty times a minute? What other power changes this grass into milk in the udder of a cow? and this bread into the flesh, blood, and bone of that child, who grows proportionally while he eats it, until he arrives at the height determined by nature, after which there is no art which can add a line to it.

Vegetables, minerals, animals, where is your originating principle? In the hands of Him who turns the sun on its axis, and who has clothed it with light. This lead will never become silver, nor this silver gold; this gold will never become diamond, nor this straw be transformed into lemons and bananas. What corpuscular system of physics, what atoms, determine their nature? You know nothing about it, and the cause will be eternally occult to you. All that surrounds us, all within us, is an enigma which it is not in the power of man to divine.

The furred ignoramus ought to have been aware of this truth when he said that beasts possess a vegetative and sensitive soul, and man a soul which is vegetative, sensitive, and intellectual. Poor man, kneaded up of pride, who has pronounced only words – have you ever seen a soul? Know you how it is made? We have spoken much of the soul in these inquiries, but have always confessed our ignorance. I now repeat this confession still more emphatically, since the more I read, the more I meditate, and the more I acquire, the more am I enabled to affirm that I know nothing.

OFFENCES (LOCAL)

If we travel throughout the whole earth, we still find that theft, murder, adultery, calumny, etc., are regarded as offences which society condemns and represses; but that which is approved in England and condemned in Italy, ought it to be punished in Italy, as if it were one of the crimes against general humanity? That which is a crime only in the precincts of some mountains, or between two rivers, demands it not from judges more indulgence than those outrages which are regarded with horror in all countries? Ought not the judge to say to himself, I should not dare to punish in Ragusa what I punish at Loretto? Should not this reflection soften his heart, and moderate the hardness which it is too apt to contract in the long exercise of his employment? The "Kermesses" of Flanders are well known; they were carried in the last century to a degree of indecency, revolting to the eyes of all persons who were not accustomed to such spectacles.

The following is the manner in which Christmas is celebrated in some countries. In the first place appears a young man half-naked, with wings on his shoulders; he repeats the Ave Maria to a young girl, who replies "fiat," and the angel kisses her on the mouth; after which a child, shut up in a great cock of pasteboard, imitates the crowing of the cock. "*Puer natus est nobis.*" A great ox bellows out "ubi"; a sheep baas out "Bethlehem"; an ass brays "hihanus", to signify "eamus"; and a long procession, preceded by four fools with bells and baubles, brings up the rear. There still remain some traces of this popular devotion, which among a civilized and educated people would be taken for profanation. A Swiss, out of patience, and possibly more intoxicated than the performers of the ox and the ass, took the liberty of remonstrating with them at Louvain, and was rewarded with no small number of blows; they would indeed have hanged him, and he escaped with great difficulty.

The same man had a dangerous quarrel at The Hague for violently taking the part of Barnevelt against an outrageous Gomarist. He was imprisoned at Amsterdam for saying that priests were the scourge of humanity, and the source of all our misfortunes. "How!" said he, "if we maintain that good works are necessary to salvation, we are sent to a dungeon; and if we laugh at a cock and an ass we risk hanging!" Ridiculous as this adventure was, it is sufficient to convince us that we may be criminal in one or two points in our hemisphere, and innocent in all the rest of the world.

ONAN

The race of Onan exhibits great singularities. The patriarch Judah, his father, lay with his daughter-in-law, Tamar the Phœnician, in the highroad; Jacob, the father of Judah, was at the same time married to two sisters, the daughters of an idolater; and deluded both his father and father-in-law. Lot, the granduncle of Jacob, lay with his two daughters. Saleum, one of the descendants of Jacob and of Judah, espoused Rahab the Canaanite, a prostitute. Boaz, son of Saleum and Rahab, received into his bed Ruth the Midianite; and was great grandfather of David. David took away Bathsheba from the warrior Uriah, her husband, and caused him to be slain, that he might be unrestrained in his amour. Lastly, in the two genealogies of Christ, which differ in so many points, but agree in this, we discover that he descended from this tissue of fornication, adultery, and incest.

Nothing is more proper to confound human prudence; to humble our limited minds; and to convince us that the ways of Providence are not like our ways. The reverend father Dom Calmet makes this reflection, in alluding to the incest of Judah with Tamar, and to the sin of Onan, spoken of in the 38th chapter of "Genesis": "Scripture," he observes, "gives us the details of a history, which on the first perusal strikes our minds as not of a nature for edification; but the hidden sense which is shut up in it is as elevated as that of the mere letter appears low to carnal eyes. It is not without good reasons that the Holy Spirit has allowed the histories of Tamar, of Rahab, of Ruth, and of Bathsheba, to form a part of the genealogy of Jesus Christ."

It might have been well if Dom Calmet had explained these sound reasons, by which we might have cleared up the doubts and appeased the scruples of all the honest and timorous souls who are anxious to comprehend how this Supreme Being, the Creator of worlds, could be born in a Jewish village, of a race of plunderers and of prostitutes. This mystery, which is not less inconceivable than other mysteries, was assuredly worthy the explanation of so able a commentator – but to return to our subject.

We perfectly understand the crime of the patriarch Judah, and of the patriarchs Simeon and Levi, his brothers, at Sichem; but it is more difficult to understand the sin of Onan. Judah had married his eldest son Er to the Phœnician, Tamar. Er died in consequence of his wickedness, and the patriarch wished his second son to espouse the widow, according to an ancient law of the Egyptians and Phœnicians, their neighbors, which was called raising up seed for his brother. The first child of this second marriage bore the name of the deceased, and this Onan objected to. He hated the memory of his brother, or to produce a child to bear the name of Er; and to avoid it took the means which are detailed in the chapter of "Genesis" already mentioned, and which are practised by no species of animals but apes and human beings.

An English physician wrote a small volume on this vice, which he called after the name of the patriarch who was guilty of it. M. Tissot, the celebrated physician of Lausanne, also wrote on this subject, in a work much more profound and methodical than the English one. These two works detail the consequences of this unhappy habit – loss of strength, impotence, weakness of the stomach and intestines, tremblings, vertigo, lethargy, and often premature death.

M. Tissot, however, to console us for this evil, relates as many examples of the mischiefs of repletion in both sexes. There cannot be a stronger argument against rash vows of chastity. From the examples afforded, it is impossible to avoid being convinced of the enormous folly of condemning ourselves to these turpitudes in order to renounce a connection which has been expressly commanded by God Himself. In this manner think the Protestants, the Jews, the Mahometans, and many other nations; the Catholics offer other reasons in favor of converts. I shall merely say of the Catholics what Dom Calmet says of the Holy Ghost – That their reasons are doubtless good, could we understand them.

OPINION

What is the opinion of all the nations of the north of America, and those which border the Straits of Sunda, on the best of governments, and best of religions; on public ecclesiastical rights; on the manner of writing history; on the nature of tragedy, comedy, opera, eclogue, epic poetry; on innate ideas, concomitant grace, and the miracles of Deacon Paris? It is clear that all these people have no opinions on things of which they have no ideas.

They have a confused feeling of their customs, and go not beyond this instinct. Such are the people who inhabit the shores of the Frozen Sea for the space of fifteen hundred leagues. Such are the inhabitants of the three parts of Africa, and those of nearly all the isles of Asia; of twenty hordes of Tartars, and almost all men solely occupied with the painful and continual care of providing their subsistence. Such are, at two steps from us, most of the Morlachians, many of the Savoyards, and some citizens of Paris.

When a nation begins to be civilized, it has some opinions which are quite false. It believes in spirits, sorcerers, the enchantment of serpents and their immortality; in possessions of the devil, exorcisms, and soothsayers. It is persuaded that seeds must grow rotten in the earth to spring up again, and that the quarters of the moon are the causes of accesses of fever.

A Talapoin persuades his followers that the god Sammonocodom sojourned some time at Siam, and that he cut down all the trees in a forest which prevented him from flying his kite at his ease, which was his favorite amusement. This idea takes root in their heads; and finally, an honest man who might doubt this adventure of Sammonocodom, would run the risk of being stoned. It requires ages to destroy a popular opinion. Opinion is called the queen of the world; it is so; for when reason opposes it, it is condemned to death. It must rise twenty times from its ashes to gradually drive away the usurper.

OPTIMISM

I beg of you, gentlemen, to explain to me how everything is for the best; for I do not understand it. Does it signify that everything is arranged and ordered according to the laws of the impelling power? That I comprehend and acknowledge. Do you mean that every one is well and possesses the means of living – that nobody suffers? You know that such is not the case. Are you of the opinion that the lamentable calamities which afflict the earth are good in reference to God; and that He takes pleasure in them? I credit not this horrible doctrine; neither do you.

Have the goodness to explain how all is for the best. Plato, the dialectician, condescended to allow to God the liberty of making five worlds; because, said he, there are five regular solids in geometry, the tetrahedron, the cube, the hexahedron, the dodecahedron, and the icosahedron. But why thus restrict divine power? Why not permit the sphere, which is still more regular, and even the cone, the pyramid of many sides, the cylinder, etc.?

God, according to Plato, necessarily chose the best of all possible worlds; and this system has been embraced by many Christian philosophers, although it appears repugnant to the doctrine of original sin. After this transgression, our globe was no more the best of all possible worlds. If it was ever so, it might be so still; but many people believe it to be the worst of worlds instead of the best.

Leibnitz takes the part of Plato; more readers than one complain of their inability to understand either the one or the other; and for ourselves, having read both of them more than once, we avow our ignorance according to custom; and since the gospel has revealed nothing on the subject, we remain in darkness without remorse.

Leibnitz, who speaks of everything, has treated of original sin; and as every man of systems introduces into his plan something contradictory, he imagined that the disobedience towards God, with the frightful misfortunes which followed it, were integral parts of the best of worlds, and necessary ingredients of all possible felicity: "*Calla, calla, senior don Carlos; todo che se haze es por su ben.*"

What! to be chased from a delicious place, where we might have lived for ever only for the eating of an apple? What! to produce in misery wretched children, who will suffer everything, and in return produce others to suffer after them? What! to experience all maladies, feel all vexations, die in the midst of grief, and by way of recompense be burned to all eternity – is this lot the best possible? It certainly is not *good* for us, and in what manner can it be so for God? Leibnitz felt that nothing could be said to these objections, but nevertheless made great books, in which he did not even understand himself.

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