

Bradlaugh Charles

**Heresy: Its Utility And Morality.
A Plea And A Justification**



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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

What is heresy that it should be so heavily punished? Why is it that society will condone many offences, pardon many vicious practices, and yet have such scant mercy for the open heretic, who is treated as though he were some horrid monster to be feared and hated? Most religionists, instead of endeavouring with kindly thought to provide some solution for the difficulties propounded by their heretical brethren, indiscriminately confound all inquirers "in one common category of censure; their views are dismissed with ridicule as sophistical and fallacious, abused as infinitely dangerous, themselves denounced as heretics and infidels, and libelled as scoffers and Atheists." With some religionists all heretics are Atheists. With the Pope of Rome, Garibaldi and Mazzini are Atheists. With the Religious Tract Society, Voltaire and Paine were Atheists. Yet in neither of the above-named cases is the allegation true. Voltaire and Paine were heretics, but both were Theists. Garibaldi and Mazzini are heretics, but neither of them is an Atheist. With few exceptions, the heretics of one generation become the revered saints of a period less than twenty generations later. Lord Bacon, in his own age, was charged with Atheism, Sir Isaac Newton with Socinianism, the famous Tillotson was actually charged with Atheism, and Dr. Burnet wrote against the commonly received traditions of the fall and deluge. There are but few men of the past of whom the church boasts to-day, who have not at some time been pointed at as heretics by orthodox antagonists excited by party rancour. Heresy is in itself neither Atheism nor Theism, neither the rejection of the Church of Rome, nor of Canterbury, nor of Constantinople; heresy is not necessarily of any ist or ism. The heretic is one who has selected his own opinions, or whose opinions are the result of some mental effort; and he differs from others who are orthodox in this: – they hold opinions which are often only the bequest of an earlier generation unquestioningly accepted; he has escaped from the customary grooves of conventional acquiescence, and sought truth outside the channels sanctified by habit.

Men and women who are orthodox are generally so for the same reason that they are English or French – they were born in England or France, and cannot help the good or ill fortune of their birth-place. Their orthodoxy is no higher virtue than their nationality. Men are good and true of every nation and of every faith; but there are more good and true men in nations where civilisation has made progress, and amongst faiths which have been modified by high humanising influences. Men are good not because of their orthodoxy, but in spite of it; their goodness is the outgrowth of their humanity, not of their orthodoxy. Heresy is necessary to progress; heresy in religion always precedes an endeavour for political freedom. You cannot have effectual political progress without wide-spread heretical thought. Every grand political change in which the people have played an important part, has been preceded by the popularisation of heresy in the immediately earlier generations.

Fortunately, ignorant men cannot be real heretics, so that education must be the hand-maiden to heresy. Ignorance and superstition are twin sisters. Belief too often means nothing more than prostration of the intellect on the threshold of the unknown. Heresy is the pioneer, erect and manly, striding over the forbidden line in his search for truth. Heterodoxy develops the intellect, orthodoxy smothers it. Heresy is the star twinkle in the night, orthodoxy the cloud which hides this faint gleam of light from the weary travellers on life's encumbered pathway. Orthodoxy is well exemplified in the dark middle ages, when the mass of men and women believed much and knew little, when miracles were common and schools were rare, and when the monasteries on the hill tops held the literature of

Europe. Heresy speaks for itself in this nineteenth century, with the gas and electric light, with cheap newspapers, with a thousand lecture rooms, with innumerable libraries, and at least a majority of the people able to read the thoughts the dead have left, as well as to listen to the words the living utter.

The word heretic ought to be a term of honour; for honest, clearly uttered heresy is always virtuous, and this whether truth or error; yet it is not difficult to understand how the charge of heresy has been generally used as a means of exciting bad feeling. The Greek word [–] which is in fact our word heresy, signifies simply, selection or choice. The heretic philosopher was the one who had searched and found, who, not content with the beaten paths, had selected a new road, chosen a new fashion of travelling in the inarch for that happiness all humankind are seeking.

Heretics are usually called "infidels," but no word could be more unfairly applied, if by it is meant anything more than that the heretic does not conform to the State Faith. If it meant those who do not profess the faith, then there would be no objection, but it is more often used of those who are unfaithful, and then it is generally a libel. Mahomedans and Christians both call Jews infidels, and Mahomedans and Christians call each other infidels. Each religionist is thus an infidel to all sects but his own; there is but one degree of heresy between him and the heretic who rejects all churches. Each ordinary orthodox man is a heretic to every religion in the world except one, but he is heretic from the accident of birth without the virtue of true heresy.

In our own country heresy is not confined to the extreme platform adopted as a standing point by such a man as myself. It is rife even in the state-sustained Church of England, and to show this one does not need to be content with such illustrations as are afforded by the Essayists and Reviewers, who discover the sources of the world's education rather in Greece and Italy than in Judea, who reject the alleged prophecies as evidence of the Messianic character of Jesus; who admit that in nature and from nature, by science and by reason, we neither have, nor can possibly have any evidence of a deity working miracles; but declare that for that we must go out of nature and beyond science, and in effect avow that Gospel miracles are always *objects*, not *evidences*, of faith; who deny the necessity of faith in Jesus as saviour to peoples Who could never have such faith; and who reject the notion that all mankind are individually involved in the curse and perdition of Adam's sin; or even by the Rev. Charles Voysey, who declines to preach "the God of the Bible," and who will not teach that every word of the Old and New Testament is the word of God; or by the Rev. Dunbar Heath, who in defiance of the Bible doctrine, that man has only existed on the earth about 6,000 years, teaches that unnumbered chiliads have passed away since the human family commenced to play at nations on our earth; or by Bishop Colenso, who in his impeachment of the Pentateuch, his denial of the literal truth of the narratives of the creation, fall, and deluge, actually impugns the whole scheme of Christianity (if the foundation be false, the superstructure cannot be true); or by the Rev. Baden Powell, who declared "that the whole tenor of geology is in entire contradiction to the cosmogony delivered from Mount Sinai," and who denied a "local heaven above and a local hell beneath the earth;" or by the Rev. Dr. Giles, who, not content with preceding Dr. Colenso in his assaults on the text of the Pentateuch, also wrote as vigorously against the text of the New Testament; or by the Rev. Dr. Wall, who, unsatisfied with arguments against the admittedly incorrect authorised translation of the Bible, actually wrote to prove that a new and corrected Hebrew text was necessary, the Hebrew itself being corrupt; or by the Rev. Dr. Irons, who teaches that not only are the Gospel writers unknown, but that the very language in which Jesus taught is yet to be discovered, who declares that prior to the Esraic period the literal history of the Old Testament is lost, who does not find the Trinity taught in Scripture, and who declares that the Gospel does not teach the doctrine of the Atonement; or by the late Archbishop Whately, to whom is attributed a Latin pamphlet raising strong objections against the truth of the alleged confusion of tongues at Babel.

We may fairly allege, that amongst thinking clergymen of the Church of England, heresy is the rule and not the exception. So soon as a minister begins to preach sermons which he does not buy ready lithographed – sermons which are the work of his brain – so soon heresy more or less buds

out, now in the rejection of some church doctrine or article of minor importance, now in some bold declaration at variance with major and more essential tenets. Even Bishop Watson's so famous for his Bible Apology, declared that the church articles and creeds were not binding on any man. "They may be true, they may be false," he wrote. Today scores of Church of England clergymen openly protest against, or groan in silence under the enforced subscription of Thirty-nine unbelievable Articles. Sir William Hamilton declares that the heads of Colleges at Oxford well knew that the man preparing for the Church "will subscribe Thirty-nine Articles which he cannot believe, who swears to do and to have done a hundred articles which he cannot or does not perform."

In scientific circles the heresy of the most efficient members is startlingly apparent. Against members of the Anthropological Society charges of Atheism are freely levelled, and although such a charge does not seem to be justified by any reports of their meetings, or by their printed publications, it is clear that not only out of doors, but even amongst their own circle it is felt that their researches conflict seriously with the Hebrew writ. The Society has been preached against and prayed against, and yet it is simply a society for discovering everything possible about man, prehistoric as well as modern. It has, however, an unpardonable vice in the eyes of the orthodox – it encourages the utterance of facts without regard to their effect on faiths.

The Ethnological Society is kindred to the last named in many of its objects, and hence some of its most active members have been direct assailants of the Hebrew Chronology, which, limits man's existence to the short space of 6,000 years; they have been deniers(sp.) of the origin of the human race from one pair, of the confusion of tongues at Babel, and of the reduction of the human race to one family by the Noachian deluge.

Geological science has a crowd of heretics amongst its professors, men who deny the sudden origin of fauna and flora; who trace the gradual development of the vegetable and animal kingdoms through vast periods of time; and who find no resting place in a beginning of existence, but are obliged to halt in face of a measureless past, inconceivable in its grandeur. Geology, to quote the words of Dr. Kalisch, declares "the utter impossibility of a creation of even the earth alone in six days." Mr. Goodwin says in the "Essays and Reviews: " "The school-books of the present day, while they teach the child that the earth moves, yet assure him that it is a little less than six thousand years old, and that it was made in six days. On the other hand, geologists of all religious creeds are agreed that the earth has existed for an immense series of years – to be counted by millions rather than by thousands; and that indubitably more than six days elapsed from its first creation to the appearance of man upon its surface."

Astronomy has in the ranks of its professors many of its most able minds who do not believe in the sun and moon as two great lights, who cannot accept the myriad stars as fixed in the firmament solely to give light upon the earth, who refuse to believe in the heaven as a fixed firmament to divide the waters above from the waters beneath, who cannot by their telescopes discover the local heaven above or the local hell beneath, although their science marks each faint nebulousity crossing, or crossed by the range of the watcher's vision. To quote again from Mr. Goodwin: – "On the revival of science in the sixteenth century, some of the earliest conclusions at which philosophers arrived, were found to be at variance with popular and long established belief. The Ptolemaic system of astronomy, which had then full possession of the minds of men, contemplated the whole visible universe from the earth as the immovable centre of things. Copernicus changed the point of view, and placing the beholder in the sun, at once reduced the earth to an inconspicuous globule, a merely subordinate member of a family of planets; which the terrestrials had, until then, fondly imagined to be but pendants and ornaments of their own habitation. The Church, naturally, took a lively interest in the disputes which arose between the philosophers of the new school, and those who adhered to the old doctrines, inasmuch as the Hebrew records, the basis of religious faith, manifestly countenanced the opinion of the earth's immobility, and certain other views of the universe, very incompatible with those propounded by Copernicus. Hence arose the official proceedings against Galileo, in consequence of

which he submitted to sign his celebrated recantation, acknowledging that 'the proposition that the sun is the centre of the world and immovable from its place, is absurd, philosophically false, and formally heretical, because it is expressly contrary to the Scripture;' and that 'the proposition that the earth is not the centre of the world, nor immovable, but that it moves, and also with a diurnal motion, is absurd, philosophically false, and at least erroneous in faith.'"

Why is it that society is so severe on heresy? Three hundred years ago it burned heretics, till thirty years ago it sent them to jail; even in England and America to-day it is content to harass, annoy, and slander them. In the United States a candidate for the Governorship of a State, although otherwise admittedly eligible, was assailed bitterly for his suspected Socinianism. Sir Sidney Waterlow, standing for a Scotch seat, was sharply catechised as to when he had last been inside the Unitarian Chapel, and only saved his seat by not too boldly avowing his opinions. Lord Amberley, who was "unwise" enough to be honest in some of his answers, did not obtain his seat for South Devon in consequence of the suspicion of heresy excited against him. It is chiefly to the *odium theologicum* that Mr. Mill may attribute his rejection at Westminster; and it is supposed to have also damaged Sir John Lubbock in West Kent. I only refrain from enlarging on my own case, because I learn from the Press that it is chiefly the vulgarity and coarseness of my heresy with which they are indignant. To reply that I have sought to avoid being coarse and vulgar is worse than useless, I am judged untried, condemned unheard; evidence is unnecessary in the case of a man who thus puts himself outside the pale.

Sir William Drummond says, "Early associations are generally the strongest in the human mind, and what we have been taught to credit as children we are seldom, disposed to question as men. Called away from speculative inquiries by the common business of life, men in general possess neither the inclination, nor the leisure to examine *what* they believe or *why* they believe. A powerful prejudice remains in the mind; ensures conviction without the trouble of thinking; and repels doubt without the aid or authority of reason. The multitude then is not very likely to applaud an author, who calls upon it to consider what it had hitherto neglected, and to stop where it had been accustomed to pass on. It may also happen that there is a learned and formidable body, which, having given its general sanction to the literal interpretation of the Holy Scriptures, may be offended at the presumption of an unhallowed layman, who ventures to hold, that the language of those Scriptures is often symbolical and allegorical, even in passages which both the Church and the Synagogue consider as nothing else than a plain statement of fact. A writer who had sufficient boldness to encounter such obstacles, and to make an appeal to the public, would only expose himself to the invectives of offended bigotry, and to the misrepresentations of interested malice. The press would be made to ring with declamations against him, and neither learning, nor argument, nor reason, nor moderation on his side, would protect him from the literary assassination which awaited him. In vain would he put on the heaven-tempered panoply of truth. The weapons which could neither pierce his buckler nor break his casque, might be made to pass with envenomed points through the joints of his armour. Every trivial error which he might commit, would be magnified into a flagrant fault; and every insignificant mistake into which he might fall, would be represented by the bigotted, or by the hireling critics of the day as an ignorant, or as a perverse deviation from the truth." Both by the Statute Law and Common Law, heresy is punishable, and many are punished for it even in the second half of the nineteenth century. A man who has been educated in, or made profession of Christianity, and who shall then deny any of the Thirty-nine Articles, is liable to indictment and imprisonment, but this course is seldom pursued; the more common practice is for the Christian to avail himself of the heretic's want of belief in order to object to his competency as a witness. Repeated instances have occurred recently in which the proposed witness has been rejected as untrustworthy, because he was too honest to pretend to hold a faith he in truth denied. Besides such open persecution, there is the constant, unceasing, paltry, petty persecuting spirit which refuses to trade with the heretic; which declines to eat with him; which will not employ him; which feels justified in slandering him, which seeks to set his wife's mind against him, and to take away the affection of his children from him.

For those who do not believe this, I will instance two clergymen of the Church of England: one (who as my teacher when a boy) set a kind father's heart against me, and drove me further in heresy than I then dreamed of marching; and the other, who in cruel wickedness tried to wound me as a man through the feelings of my wife and children, whom he most vilely and basely slandered. The first is yet unpunished, the second escaped condign punishment only by writing himself down libeller, and praying pardon for the slanderous coinage of his brain. And yet this latter Church of England clergyman, who had written a strong letter thanking me for my generous forbearance, and who from his own pulpit pretended to express his sorrow, is actually the first and only man in my neighbourhood to cry "Atheist" against me, when I mingle in political life, and he thinks the phrase may wound and injure me.

CHAPTER II. THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

It requires a more practised pen than mine to even faintly sketch the progress of heresy during the past three centuries, but I trust to say enough to give the reader an idea of its rapid growth and wide extension. I say of the past three centuries, because it is only during the past three hundred years that heresy has made the majority of its converts amongst the mass of the people. In earlier times heretics were not only few, but they talked to the few, and wrote to the few, in the language of the few; and indeed it may be fairly said, that it is only during the last hundred years that the greatest men have sought to make heresy "vulgar;" that is, to make it common. One of our leading scientific men admitted recently that he had been reproved by some of his more orthodox friends, for not confining to the Latin language such of his geological opinions as were supposed to be most dangerous to the Hebrew records. The starting-point of the real era of popular heresy may be placed at the early part of the sixteenth century, when the memories of Huss and Ziska (who had really inoculated the mass with some spirit of heretical resistance a century before) aided Luther in resisting Rome.

Martin Luther, born at Eisleben in Saxony, in 1483, was one of the heretics who sought popular endorsement for his heresy, and who following the example of the Ulrich Zuingli, of Zurich, preached to the people in rough plain words. While others were limited to Latin, he rang out in plain German his opposition to Tetzl and his protectors. I know that to-day, Martin Luther is spoken of by orthodox Protestants as if he were a saint without blemish, and indeed I do not want to deprive the Christian Church of the honour of his adherence; he is hardly good enough and true enough for a first-class heretic. Yet in justification of my ranking him even so temporarily amongst the heretics of the sixteenth century, it will be sufficient to mention that he regarded "the books of the Kings as more worthy of credit than the books of the Chronicles," that he wrote as follows: – "The book of Esdras I toss into the Elbe." "I am so an enemy to the book of Esther I would it did not exist." "Job spake not therefore as it stands written in his book." "It is a sheer *argumentum fabulæ*" "The book of the Proverbs of Solomon has been pieced together by others," of Ecclesiastes "there is too much of broken matter in it; it has neither boots nor spurs, but rides only in socks." "Isaiah hath borrowed his whole art and knowledge from David." "The history of Jonah is so monstrous that it is absolutely incredible." "The Epistle to the Hebrews is not by St. Paul, nor indeed by any Apostle." "The Epistle of James I account the writing of no Apostle," and "is truly an Epistle of sham." The Epistle of Jude "allegeth sayings or stories which have no place in Scripture," "of Revelation I can discover no trace that it is established by the Holy Spirit." If Martin Luther were alive to-day, the Established Church of England, which pretends to revere him, would prosecute him in the English Ecclesiastical Courts if he ventured to repeat the foregoing phrases from her pulpits. What would the writers who attack me for coarseness, say of the following passage, which occurs with reference to Melancthon, whom Luther boasts that he raised miraculously from the dead? "Melancthon," says Sir William Hamilton, to whose essay I am indebted for the extracts here given, "had fallen ill at Weimar from contrition and fear for the part he had been led to take in the Landgrave's polygamy: his life was even in danger." "Then and there," said Luther, "I made our Lord God to smart for it. For I threw down the sack before the door, and rubbed his ears with all his promises of hearing prayer, which I knew how to recapitulate from Holy Writ, so that he could not but hearken to me, should I ever again place any reliance on his promises." Martin Luther, with his absolute denial of free-will, and with his double code of morality for princes and peasants – easy for one and harsh for the other – may be fairly left now with those who desire to vaunt his orthodoxy; here his name is used only to illustrate the popular impetus given to nonconformity by his quarrel with the papal authorities. Luther protested against the Romish Church, but established by the very fact the right for some more advanced man than Doctor Martin to protest in turn against the Lutheran Church. The only consistent church in Christendom is the Romish Church, for it claims the right to think for all its followers.

The whole of the Protestant Churches are inconsistent, for they claim the right to think and judge against Rome, but deny extremer Nonconformists the right to think and judge against themselves. Goethe, says Froude, declares that Luther threw back the intellectual progress of mankind by using the passions of the multitude to decide subjects which should have been left to the learned. I do not believe this to be wholly true, for the multitude once having their ears fairly opened, listened to more than the appeal to their passions, and examined for themselves propositions which otherwise they would have accepted or rejected from habit and without inquiry. Martin Luther's public discussions with pen and tongue, in Wittemberg, Augsburg, Liebenwerd, and Lichtenberg, and the protest he encouraged against Rome, were the commencement of a vigorous controversy, in which the public (who heard for the first time sharp controversial sermons preached publicly in the various pulpits by Lutheran preachers on free-will and necessity, election and predestination, &c.) began to take real part and interest; and which is still going on, and will in fact never end until the unholy alliance of Church and State is everywhere annulled, and each religion is left to sustain itself by its own truth, or to fall from its own weakness, no man being molested under the law on account of his opinions on religious matters. While Luther undoubtedly gave an impetus to the growth of Rationalism by his own appeal to reason and his reliance on reason for himself, it is not true that he contended for the right of general freedom of inquiry, nor would he have left unlimited the privileges of individual judgment for others. He could be furious in his denunciations of reason when a freer thinker than himself dared to use it against his superstitions. It is somewhat remarkable that while on the one hand one man, Luther, was detaching from the Church of Rome a large number of minds, another man, Loyola, was about the same time engaged in founding that powerful society (the Society of Jesuits), which has done so much to check free inquiry and maintain the priestly domination over the human intellect. That which Luther commenced in Germany roughly, inefficiently, and perhaps more from personal feeling for the privileges of the special order to which he belonged than from desire for popular progress, was aided in its permanent effect by Descartes, in England by Bacon, in France by Montaigne, and in Italy by Bruno.

Francis Bacon, Lord Verulam, was born on the 22nd January, 1561, and died 1626. His mother, Anne, daughter of Sir Anthony Cooke, was a woman of high education, and certainly with some inclinations favourable to Freethought, for she had herself translated into English some of the sermons on fate and free-will of Bernard Ochino, or Bernardin Ochinus, an Italian Reforming Heretic, alike repudiated by the powers at Rome, Geneva, Wittemberg, and Zurich. Ochino, in his famous disquisition "touching the freedom or bondage of the human will, and the foreknowledge, predestination, and liberty of God," after discussing, with great acuteness, and from different points of view, these important topics, comes to the conclusion that there is no outlet to the mazes of thought in which the honest speculator plunges in the endeavour to solve these problems. Although, like other writers of that and earlier periods, many of Bacon's works were published in Latin, he wrote and published also in English, and if I am right in numbering him as one of the heretics of the sixteenth century, he must be also counted a vulgar heretic – i.e., one who wrote in the vulgar tongue, who preached his heresy in the language which the mass understood. Lewes says, "Bacon and Descartes are generally recognised as the Fathers of Modern Philosophy, although they themselves were carried along by the rapidly-swelling current of their age, then decisively setting in the direction of science. It is their glory to have seen visions of the coming greatness, to have expressed in terms of splendid power, the thoughts which were dimly stirring the age, and to have sanctioned the new movement by their authoritative genius." Bacon was the populariser of that method of reasoning known as the inductive, that method which seeks to trace back from the phenomena of the moment to the eternal noumenon or noumena – from the conditioned to the absolute. Nearly two thousand years before, the same method had been taught by Aristotle in opposition to Plato, and probably long thousands of years before the grand Greek, pre-historic schoolmen had used the method; it is natural to the human mind. The Stagirite was the founder of a school, Bacon the teacher and populariser for a

nation. Aristotle's Greek was known to few, Bacon's eloquent English opened out the subject to the many whom he impregnated with his own confidence in the grand progressiveness of human thought. Lewes says; "The spirit of his philosophy was antagonistic to Theology, for it was a spirit of doubt and search; and its search was for visible and tangible results." Bacon himself, in his essay on Superstition, says: "Atheism leaves a man to sense, to philosophy, to natural piety, to laws, to reputation, all which may be guides to an outward moral virtue, though religion were not; but superstition dismounts all these, and erecteth an absolute monarchy in the minds of men: therefore Atheism did never perturb states; for it makes men wary of themselves, as looking no further; and we see the times inclined to Atheism, as the time of Augustus Caesar were civil times; but superstition hath been the confusion of many states, and bringeth in a new *primum mobile* (the first motive cause), that ravisheth all the spheres of government." It is true that he also wrote against Atheism, and this in strong language, but his philosophy was not used for the purpose of proving theological propositions. He said: "True philosophy is that which is the faithful echo of the voice of the world, which is written in some sort under the dictation of things, which adds nothing of itself, which is only the rebound, the reflection of reality." It has been well said that the words "Utility and Progress" give the keynotes of Bacon's teachings. With one other extract we leave his writings. "Crafty men," he says, "contemn studies, simple men admire them, and wise men use them; for they teach not their own use; but that is a wisdom without them, and above them, won by observation. Read not to contradict and confute, nor to believe and take for granted, nor to find talk and discourse; but to weigh and consider. Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested. Reading maketh a full man; conference a ready man; and writing an exact man; and therefore, if a man write little, he need have a great memory; if he confer little, he need have a present wit; and if he read little, he had need have much cunning, to seem to know that he doth not. Histories make men wise; poets witty; the mathematics subtle; natural philosophy deep; moral, grave; logic and rhetoric, able to contend." He was the father of experimental philosophy. In one of his suggestions as to the force of attraction of gravitation may be found the first aid to Sir Isaac Newton's later demonstrations on this head; another of his suggestions, worked out by Torricelli, ended in demonstrating the gravity of the atmosphere. But to the method he so popularised may be attributed the grandest discoveries of modern times. It is to be deplored that the memory of his moral weakness should remain to spoil the praise of his grand intellect.

Lord Macaulay, in the *Edinburgh Review*, after contrasting at some length the philosophy of Plato with that of Bacon, said; – "To sum up the whole: we should say that the aim of the Platonic philosophy was to exalt man into a god. The aim of the Baconian philosophy was to provide man with what he requires while he continues to be man. The aim of the Platonic philosophy was to raise us far above vulgar wants. The aim of the Baconian philosophy was to supply our vulgar wants. The former aim was noble; but the latter was attainable. Plato drew a good bow; but, like Acestes in Virgil, he aimed at the stars; and therefore, though there was no want of strength or skill, the shot was thrown away. His arrow was indeed followed by a track of dazzling radiance, but it struck nothing. Bacon fixed his eye on a mark which was placed on the earth and within bowshot, and hit it in the white. The philosophy of Plato began in words and ended in words – noble words in deed-words such as were to be expected from the finest of human intellects exercising boundless dominion over the finest of human languages. The philosophy of Bacon began in observations and ended in arts."

In France the political heresy of Jean Bodin – who challenged the divine right of rulers; who proclaimed the right of resistance against oppressive decrees of monarchs; who had words of laudation for tyrannicide, and yet had no conception that the multitude were entitled to use political power, but on the contrary wrote against them – was very imperfect, the conception of individual right was confounded in the habit of obedience to monarchical authority. Bodin is classed by Mosheim amongst the writers who sowed the seeds of scepticism in France; but although he was far from an orthodox man, it is doubtful if Bodin ever intended his views to be shared beyond the class to which he belonged.

To the partial glimpse of individual right in the works of Bodin add the doctrine of political fraternity taught by La Boetie, and then this political heresy becomes dangerous in becoming popular.

The most decided heretic and doubter of the sixteenth century was one Sanchez, by birth a Portuguese, and practising as a physician at Toulouse; but the impetus which ultimately led to the spread and popularity of sceptical opinions in relation to politics and theology, is chiefly due to the satirical romances of Rabelais and the essays of Montaigne. "What Rabelais was to the supporters of theology," says Buckle, "that was Montaigne to the theology itself. The writings of Rabelais were only directed against the clergy, but the writings of Montaigne were directed against the system of which the clergy were the offspring."

Montaigne was born at Bordeaux 1533, died 1592. Louis Blanc says of his words, "Et ce ne sont pas simples discours d'un philosophe à des philosophes. Montaigne s'adresse à tous." Montaigne's words were not those of a philosopher talking only to his own order, he addressed himself to mankind at large, and he wrote in language the majority could easily comprehend. Voltaire points out that Montaigne as a philosopher was the exception in France to his class; he having succeeded in escaping that persecution which fell so heavily on others. Montaigne's thoughts were like sharp instruments scattered broadcast, and intended for the destruction of many of the old social and conventional bonds; he was the advocate of individualism, and placed each man as above society, rather than society as more important than each man. Montaigne mocked the reasoners who contradicted each other, and derided that fallibility of mind which regarded the opinion of the moment as infallibly true, and which was yet always temporarily changed by an attack of fever or a draught of strong drink, and often permanently modified by some new discovery. Less fortunate than Montaigne, Godfrey a Valle was burned for heresy in Paris in 1572, his chief offence having been that of issuing a work entitled "De Arte Nihil Credendi."

Heresy thus championed in France, Germany, and England, had in Italy its sixteenth century soldiers in Pomponatius of Mantua, Giordano Bruno, and Telesio, both of Naples, and in Campanella of Calabria, a gallant band, who were nearly all met with the cry of "Atheist," and were either answered with exile, the prison, or the faggot.

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