

**INFIDELITY TESTED BY
FACT: A SERIES
OF PAPERS, REPRINTED
FROM "THE CHURCH"**

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Infidelity tested by fact: a series of papers, reprinted from "The Church" by S. Manning

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S. MANNING

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A SERIES OF PAPERS,

REPRINTED FROM "THE CHURCH."

**BY THE
REV. S. MANNING.**

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M.DCCC.L.



ADVERTISEMENT.

Whilst the following pages have been passing through the press, the attention of the writer has been directed to an Essay entitled, "Reason and Faith; their Conflicts and their Claims," in which the line of argument here pursued has been partially anticipated. Should these brief sketches fall into the hands of any who are not acquainted with that elaborate essay, he would recommend it to their notice, as one of the most valuable defences of the faith which has appeared since the days of Butler and Paley.

INFIDELITY TESTED BY FACT.

It is designed, in the following series of papers, to present, in a simple form, the argument for the historical truth of christianity, drawn from the acknowledged facts of secular history. The facts reasoned upon will be such that all persons may verify them for themselves; the evidence adduced such that all may test its truth. It is believed that each paper will afford a probability, more or less strong, that we are not following cunningly devised fables, and it is hoped that the cumulative force of the whole will shew the absurdity of infidelity, and the credulity of the infidel. The various arguments have no pretensions either to novelty or originality. All that has been attempted is simplicity, brevity, and directness.

No. I.

THE CHARACTER OF THE PERIOD IN WHICH CHRISTIANITY ORIGINATED.

It is an evident and undoubted fact, that, about the time when the Imperial power was established in Rome, another power sprang up alongside of it. Despicable at first, it soon gathered strength. A movement commenced, an impulse was given, which continues down even to our own day. Jesus of

Nazareth announced himself as the expected Messiah, and began to preach his gospel. Were his pretensions true or false? He was either an impostor, or a fanatic, or a prophet sent from God. Which?

In answering this question, it is most important to remember that there is no period of the world's history with which we are better acquainted than the one under review. We know the events which happened, and the modes of thought which prevailed, more accurately than those even of our own land prior to the use of printing. Its history is narrated to us by contemporaneous historians. Its mental and moral characteristics are most clearly reflected in the pages of its orators and poets. A century or two earlier or later, and we should be involved in much uncertainty; but this is just the point in which our knowledge of antiquity is concentrated as in a focus. This arises from the fact, that in no age, before or since (till the present), has mental activity been so widely diffused. The schools of philosophy, hitherto confined to one or two cities of Greece, were now established in almost every important town throughout the Roman world. The civil and military officers of Rome carried with them the literature and science of the metropolis to the remotest cities and provinces of the empire. Of that age and of this, it may emphatically be said, that "many run to and fro, and knowledge is increased."

It was, too, beyond all parallel, a sceptical and scoffing age. Not only were the current mythologies stripped of their antique grandeur and unsparingly satirized, but religious con-

victions of every kind were met by derision and scorn.* Neither the hoary magnificence of the Egyptian, nor the poetic beauty of the Grecian, nor the sublime, severe simplicity of the Jewish creed and worship, could gain reverence, or escape the derisive laugh of these scoffers. Even those who, with Plutarch, still clung fondly to the old beliefs, were compelled to give up their historic truth, and explain them into mystic allusions, allegories, and myths.

If, however, there was one religious profession which met with more unsparing contempt than another, it was the Jewish. Nation and worship alike were satirized and denounced. The Jew then, as now, was a by-word and reproach. Historian and poet combined to brand worship and worshipper with unutterable contempt and abhorrence. Of all the Provinces which the haughty Roman ruled, Judæa was perhaps the most despised, and, as far as the character of its people went, the most despicable.

Nor was Judæa itself exempt from the sceptical tendencies of the age. The old reverential spirit was gone. The deep sense of, and the firm faith in, the invisible, the infinite, the spiritual, which had characterized the nation in its better days, had now been exchanged either for a mere material, ceremonial worship, or else for utter infidelity. The Sadducees,

* A distinction important to be borne in mind in estimating the character of the period. Socrates and his school reprobated, indeed, the superstitions and mythologies then in vogue, but earnestly longed for a purer religious faith, and sought to extract one from the mass of error. The sceptical philosophy of the Augustan age, however, which culminated in Lucian, scoffed at and rejected religion in its essence.

denying angel, and spirit, and a future life, and the Pharisees, degrading religion into a round of external observances, divided between them the religion, or rather the irreligion, of the Jewish nation.

Now, was this an age in which an impostor or a fanatic could gain credence? Pretended miracles may attract disciples in an age of credulity and ignorance, and from among those classes who in every age are ignorant or credulous. It is conceivable enough how, in the dim twilight of a remote antiquity, or amid the darkness of the middle ages, men of like passions with ourselves should be invested by their admirers with supernatural attributes. Hence the gods of heathenism, and the demi-gods of the papacy. But is it possible that false pretensions to supernatural power could pass undetected and unrebuked in such an age as that? In darkness and solitude men may believe that they see apparitions—the obscurity invests objects, which are of the earth earthy, with mysterious and ghostly forms. But who has ever heard of an apparition in broad daylight, and in a crowded marketplace? Or who can conceive of the success of a false claimant of miraculous endowments in the light and bustle of the Augustan age? If the old religions,—sanctioned by authority and antiquity,—appealing to the national pride,—sympathizing with, and even growing out from, the national characteristics of the worshippers,—celebrated by all the genius of the heathen world, and adorned by all its arts,—consecrated by ten thousand associations of the past, and interwoven with all the political, civil, and domestic life of the present,—if reli-

gions thus sanctioned and supported could not *retain* their hold upon that incredulous age, because they could not stand the test to which they were exposed, is it probable that a new imposture could *gain* such a hold?

Add to this, that not only was the new faith without such sanctions and supports, but that it sprang from, and was promulgated by, the Jews—the despised and outcast race. *Their* incredulity must first have been imposed upon,—though all their prejudices were opposed to the innovations (those who believed, and those who disbelieved, the old religion, would alike be prejudiced against the new—the one from bigotry, the other from incredulity), and though all the means of disproof were at hand, for the events were said to have happened under their own eyes; and then, thus imposed upon themselves, they must set themselves to the seemingly impossible task of converting the contemptuous and scoffing Gentiles to faith in the imposture. Suppose a mission should arrive in England, announcing, as a teacher sent from God, a Hindoo who had suffered the death of a felon and a slave, would such an assertion be likely to meet with credence? would it not be met with derision? Still less likelihood would such a mission have of success, had it arrived in France during the universal Atheism of the first Revolution. Yet this is just a parallel case with the preaching of Jesus by the apostles, and such was just the treatment they received. Yet we find from the testimony of indifferent and hostile historians, writing contemporaneously with the events they narrate, that very speedily the world was filled with this doctrine; that there was no