

**THE FAITH AS
UNFOLDED BY MANY
PROPHETS: AN ESSAY**

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The Faith as Unfolded by Many Prophets: An Essay by Harriet Martineau

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HARRIET MARTINEAU

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AS UNFOLDED BY MANY PROPHETS:

A N E S S A Y.

BY

HARRIET MARTINEAU.

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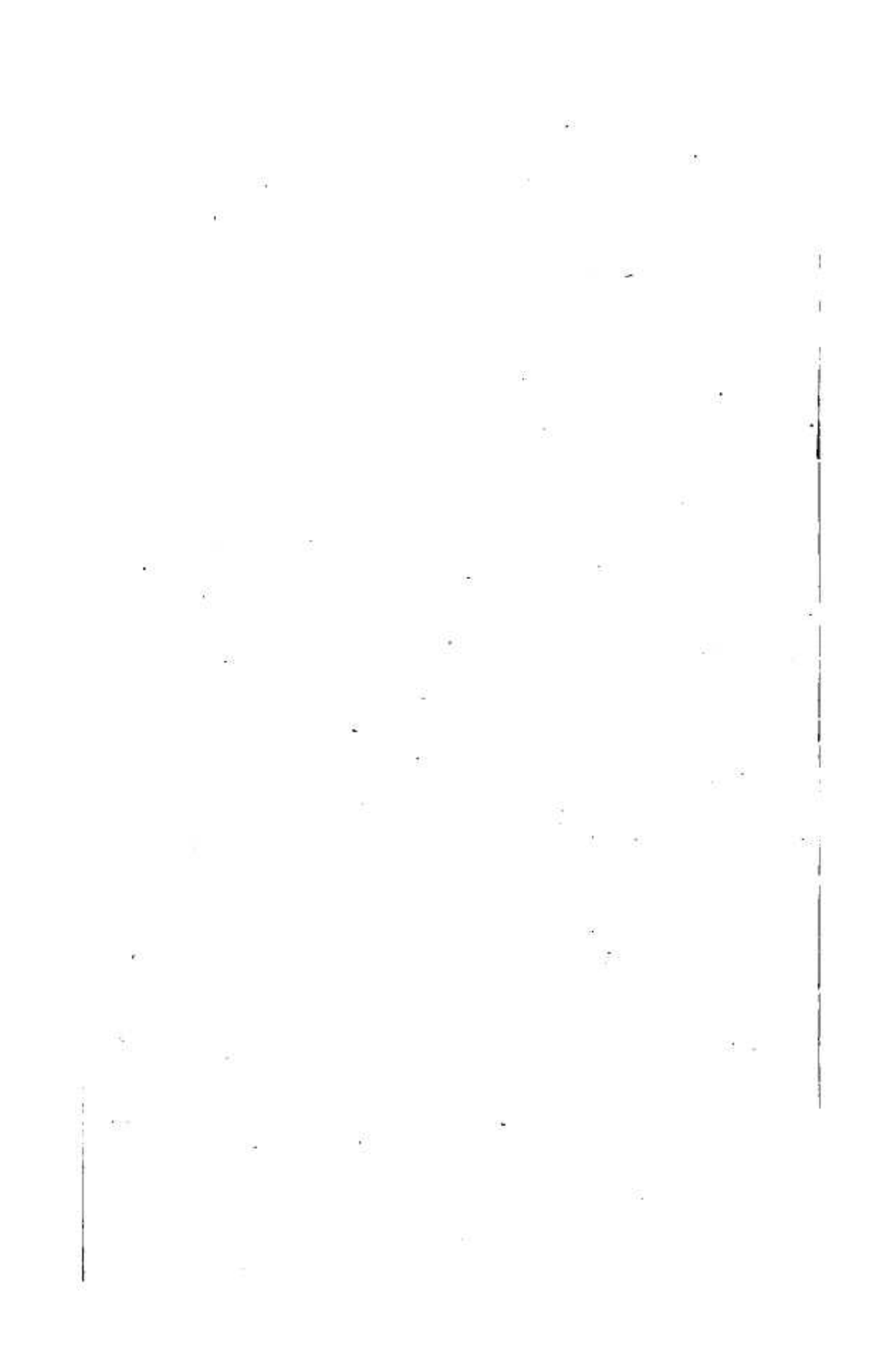
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THE FAITH

AS UNFOLDED BY MANY PROPHETS.

I.—*There is no God but God.*

THERE was a friendship like that of brothers between Havilah the son of Aram, and a man of another nation, to whom Havilah gave the name of Eber. Yet Eber was a Christian, while Havilah was a follower of the Prophet. Havilah remembered how his father had early taught him to despise the Jews and Christians, and how he had hated them in his youth; yet he did not repent of his love for Eber.

Eber was not like many persons, whether Musselmen, Jews, or Christians, who having known no men but those of their own country and their own religion, despise or fear all other men. He had left his own country many years before, and had travelled from the sun-setting to the sun-rising; and as his heart was open to every man, there were some found to love him in every land: and among these was Havilah. When Havilah's child was sick, Eber had, by the blessing of God, restored him. When Havilah's wife had died, Eber wept with the mourner and comforted him. Havilah, in his turn, opened his house and his bosom to the Christian, and made him as his brother.

It happened, one day, that as the sun drew near its setting, Havilah and Eber went out beneath the shade of spreading trees, where the evening breeze might come to them to refresh them after the heats of the day. While the Christian watched

how the sun hastened down the sky, his friend withdrew a little space to repeat his accustomed prayers. When Havilah had returned, and they were both seated beneath a tree, Eber said to him :

Though we worship not side by side, nor in the name of the same Prophet, yet we worship together ; for we pray to the same God, often at the same time,—and may it not be said in the same spirit ?

So I even believe, my friend. Yet has the Prophet declared that there is much evil in friendship with unbelievers. Listen to what is said in the Book : “ O true believers, have no intimate friendship with any besides yourselves : they will not fail to corrupt you.” “ Behold, ye love them, and they do not love you : ye believe in the Scriptures, and when they meet you, they say, ‘ We believe ; ’ but when they assemble privately together, they are full of wrath against you *.” If I had loved a Christian of whom these things were to be believed, I had disobeyed the Prophet ; but Mohammed himself would have loved one whose heart is open as the heart of Eber.

Is it not elsewhere told in the Book, Havilah, who are the infidels whose friendship is dangerous ? Is it not those “ who make a laughing-stock and a jest of your religion † ; ” who “ when ye call to prayer, make a laughing-stock and a jest of it, because they are people who do not understand ? ” I have never thus jested, nor sought to turn Havilah from his faith.

Never, said Havilah. Yet is Eber among those who do not understand : else, as surely as the thirsty fields drink in the rain, would the heart of Eber receive gladly the wisdom of the Prophet.

So say the Christians of those who are called the Faithful, replied Eber. Why should we not both be of those who understand ? The same God, the One, who spread out the firmament and the sea and the fruitful fields, who bade the lion roar in the desert, and the elephant hide himself in the forests, and the flocks gather round the dwellings of men,

* Koran, chap. 3.

† Ibid. chap. 5.

hath given to each of us, not only the heart to love, but the mind to understand. Let us therefore try to understand, and to learn wisdom each of the other.

Yet, replied Havilah, did not Jesus the son of Mary, command not to give that which is holy unto the dogs? How then may the Christians impart of their faith to those who will not receive it; to those who despise it, and who are therefore cast out as dogs?

If there be hope that they will cease to despise, the Christian looks on them, not as dogs but as brethren. This is the sign by which he knows them for brethren,—that they worship the same Father.

Havilah answered, I worship, saying, "God is One God; the eternal God, and there is not any one like unto him! He is the Lord of the heavens; the Lord of the earth; the Lord of all creatures, the mighty, the wise God*."

Thus also I worship.

When, continued Havilah, I read in the Book that "there are infidels who say, 'Verily God is Christ, the son of Mary,'" I go on to say in the words of the Book, "And who could gainsay God if he pleased to destroy Christ, the son of Mary, and his mother, and all those who are in the earth? For unto God belongeth the kingdom of heaven and earth, and whatsoever is contained between them: he createth what he pleaseth, and God is almighty †."

So have I ever believed of God, said Eber; and if there be some who believe that Jesus is God, I am not of them. I also say in the words of the Book, "Say not, there are three Gods; forbear this †." Also "Christ doth not proudly disdain to be a servant unto God:" forasmuch as he said, "O children of Israel, serve God, my Lord and your Lord."

Havilah replied, Wise is the saying, "Neither is there any other god with him, otherwise every god had surely taken

* Koran, chap. 112 & 45.

† Ibid. chap. 5.

‡ Ibid. chap. 4 & 5.

away that he had created; and some of them had created themselves above the others*.”

If, replied Eber, there had been no voice from God to teach us this, our eyes would have taught us the truth. It is many ages since the sun began to move as he has moved today, and the moon to divide the months as at this time. Our fathers watched their flocks in the plains, and saw how the stars moved silently from one part of the heaven unto the other, even as we shall behold them when this evening light has passed away. The fields also have been fruitful or bare; the flocks have borne their young, or sought shelter from storms as the seasons came round, from the days of Noah until now. It must be that the hand of one Preserver hath guided the motions of the earth and of the sky; and that the smile of one Father hath blessed mankind from one generation to another.

Havilah praised the great name, and said, Our ears also have heard that He is One.

Yes, continued his friend, it is the same voice which spoke with Adam in the garden, and called Noah from among men, and Abraham into a far country; the same which gave commandments by the Prophets, and promises by the Apostles, and the words of life by Christ.

And by Mohammed his greatest prophet, added Havilah: but his friend answered not.

If there be but one God, said Havilah after a while, there can be but one truth, and this the Prophet taught. Thus he said, There is but one true faith †,—that faith is given to men as it pleaseth God: sometimes in the law of the Jews, and sometimes in the Scriptures of the Christians; and above all, in the words of the Book. It was this truth which was given to Adam when the angels worshiped him, and to Abraham when he received the promise, and to Moses when he gave the law, and to Solomon when he sanctified the temple, and

* Koran, chap. 23.

† Preliminary Dissertation to Sale's Koran, p. 63, 4to.