

THE APOLOGY OF AN UNBELIEVER

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649348282

The Apology of an Unbeliever by Louis Viardot

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

www.triestepublishing.com

LOUIS VIARDOT

**THE APOLOGY OF
AN UNBELIEVER**

THE
APOLOGY OF AN UNBELIEVER.

BY
LOUIS VIARDOT.



—
"The Eternity of the world once admitted, all else follows."
Sainte Beuve, Letter to the Author.

—
Translated from the Third French Edition,

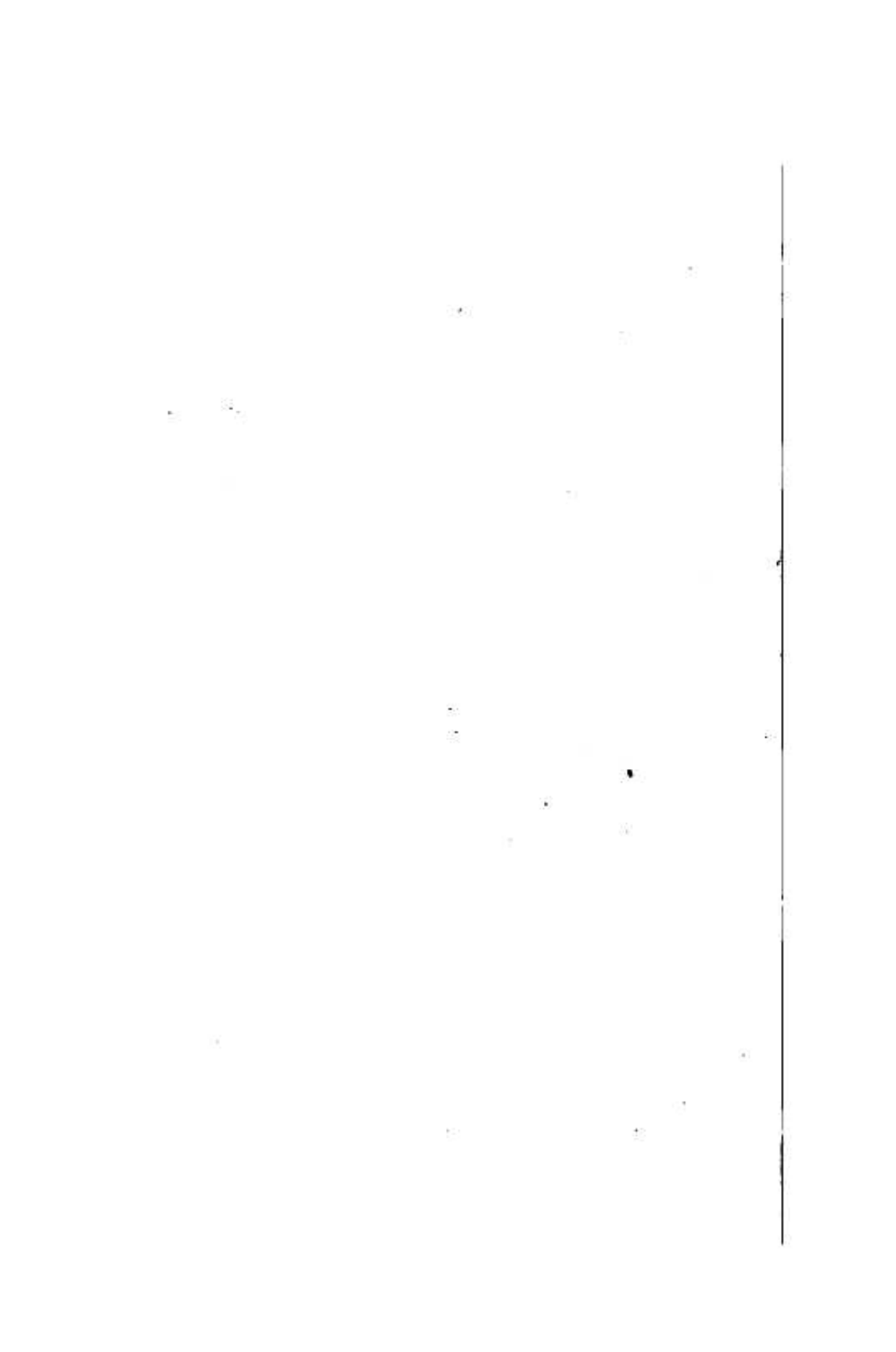
With the consent and approbation of the Author.

—
LONDON:
TRÜBNER AND CO., 60, PATERNOSTER ROW.

1869.

—
All Rights reserved.

265. k. 61.



BADEN, *November, 1866.*

To P'

It has happened to us sometimes, in the course of conversation, to touch upon the great questions of philosophy. It is not a good plan. Conversation is necessarily broken up by interruptions, by digressions, by questions and answers. One loses continually the line of thought and reasoning. I desire to begin and to continue the conversation in order to enunciate, in a few concise paragraphs, my opinions on these subjects. They have sprung from the reflections of a long, honourable, and studious lifetime. It is not my fault if these reflections have destroyed, piece by piece, all the edifice of ordinary belief (an edifice in which I long took shelter), and have reduced me like Montaigne, to have nothing whereon to lay my head, but the "pillow of doubt." Far from professing incredulity, I confess it, and seek in all

Incarnation,* the Redemption, the Eucharist, which are believed in, precisely as St. Augustine says, *quia absurdum*.† Miracles, from that of Joshua stopping the sun, or Jesus raising up Lazarus, down to St. Apolline, through whose intercession toothache is cured; Sacraments which obtrude themselves throughout our lives, from baptism to extreme unction;—round about man, angels and demons, legends of Paradise, of Purgatory, and of Hell. This system is complete, it is convenient. Believers have learnt it; they teach it, they hold to it; they believe they believe.

It is our duty to examine.

On the one hand, in the last and in the present century, in the *Profession de Foi du Vicaire Savoyard*, and in the *Religion Naturelle* of my

* Like the Avatar, according to the Brahmins, of Vischnou in the bosom of the Virgin Maia: like the two twins brought into the world by the Virgin Tétéoïnan in Mexico, etc.

† "I do not seek to understand in order to believe," said Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury, "but to believe in order to understand." His successors, the contemporaries of Darwin, Huxley and Tyndall, continue to preach the same doctrine.

worthy friend Jules Simon, the spiritualist philosophers have put forth a vast improvement on official Christianity. Although religious, they have shown themselves to be sincere, reasonable, tolerant, humane. They have sternly rejected all superstitions, all *absurda*. The only positive beliefs which they have retained are those in an eternal God, the Creator and Ruler of the world, and in an immortal soul, gifted with free will, and which will, in another world, be judged according to its works. Upon these two fundamental beliefs they found a pure and wise morality, capable of consoling and sanctifying our lives, and happy, indeed, it seems to me, would mankind be, if in its urgent need of some sort of religion, it adopted this simple form of a purified Deism.

I admit it: but, as Channing himself, the pious apostle of the Unitarians, says, man believes what he can, not what he would. He ought to question the reason which God has given him, "reason that controller-general of all that is within and without the vault of heaven" (Montaigne). Our Spiritualists themselves say, with pride, "We prefer error freely searched for, to truth servilely adopted" (Paul Janet, *Spiritualisme Français*).

Again I say, it is our duty to inquire.

II. OF THE CREATION.

So long as men believed that their little planet was the centre of the universe—that above the earth flat and immoveable,* the firmament, alternately traversed by two great luminaries, “the sun to rule by day, the moon by night,” formed a vault—one understands that they could believe in a creation like that related in Genesis. The seven days, which are seven periods, have a certain agreement with the course of the world’s formation. Men could then literally admit, for instance, the God of the Jews, who walked about in Eden, ascended on a cloud, hid Himself behind a bush, surrounded Himself, in order to increase His majesty, with thunder and lightning, talked familiarly with Adam, Cain, Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Moses, and did not even take it amiss that the Philistines and Amalekites had different gods of their own. But now-a-days, science has pierced with a sure glance, the immensity of the heavens, and with a no less sure hand has laid down the

* “I have made the earth like a sheet, and the heavens like a tent above it” (Psalms).

“And Gaia (the earth) produced, first, starry Ouranos (the sky), equal to herself, for he covers all her surface” (Hesiod).

“God has given you the earth for a base, and the heavens for an abode” (Koran).

mighty laws which rule the universe. The mere fact that the Almanack predicts to an hour the return of a tide, of an eclipse, of a comet, demonstrates the power of science, and brings it home to the most ignorant. She has necessarily shaken the obsolete and childish beliefs of primitive humanity. When Galileo said, "*E pur si muove*,"* he destroyed with a word all the theogonies which had prevailed among men. Newton, Buffon, Volta, Linnæus, Lavoisier, Lalande, Herschel, Darwin, Kirchof (by these I would designate, astronomy, natural science, chemistry, geometry, natural history), have completed his work and his victory. We now know that this earth is only one of the smallest satellites of the sun,—himself, although the astronomers give him thirteen hundred thousand times the volume of the earth, but one of the eighteen thousand little stars which go to compose the nebula which, among five or six thousand others, is called the Milky Way. And each time that we succeed in enlarging the

* Léon Foucault has made the motion of the earth visible and tangible. We might well say of Galileo's exclamation, what Byron said of a far less important one:—

"Methinks these are the most tremendous words,
Since 'Mené, Mené, Tekel,' and 'Upharsin.'"