JULES MICHELET

LA SORCIÈRE: THE WITCH OF THE MIDDLE AGES


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PREFACE.

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In this translation of a work rich in the raciest beauties and defects of an author long since made known to the British public, the present writer has striven to recast the trenchant humour, the scornful eloquence, the epigrammatic dash of Mr. Michelet, in language not all unworthy of such a word-master. How far he has succeeded others may be left to judge. In one point only is he aware of having been less true to his original than in theory he was bound to be. He has slurred or slightly altered a few of those passages which French readers take as a thing of course, but English ones, because of their different training, are supposed to eschew. A Frenchman, in short, writes for men, an Englishman rather for drawing-room ladies, who tolerate grossness only in the theatres and the columns of the newspapers. Mr. Michelet's subject, and his late researches, lead him into details, moral and physical, which among ourselves are seldom mixed up with themes of general talk. The coarsest of these have been pruned away, but enough perhaps remain to startle readers of especial prudery. The translator, however, felt that he had no choice between shocking these and sinning against his original. Readers of a larger culture will make allowance for such a strait, will not be so very frightened at an amount of plain-speaking, neither in itself immoral, nor, on the whole, impertinent. Had he docked his work of everything condemned by prudish theories, he might have made it more conventionally decent; but Michelet would have been

puzzled to recognize himself in the poor maimed cripple that would then have borne his name.

Nor will a reader of average shrewdness mistake the religious drift of a book suppressed by the Imperial underlings in the interests neither of religion nor of morals, but merely of Popery in its most outrageous form. If its attacks on Rome seem, now and then, to involve Christianity itself, we must allow something for excess of warmth, and something for the nature of inquiries which laid bare the rotten outgrowths of a religion in itself the purest known among men. In studying the so-called Ages of Faith, the author has only found them worthy of their truer and older title, the Ages of Darkness. It is against the tyranny, feudal and priestly, of those days, that he raises an outcry, warranted almost always by facts which a more mawkish philosophy refuses to see. If he is sometimes hasty and onesided; if the Church and the Feudal System of those days had their uses for the time being; it is still a gain to have the other side of the subject kept before us by way of counterpoise to the doctrines now in vogue. We need not be intolerant; but Rome is yet alive.

Taken as a whole, Mr. Michelet’s book cannot be called unchristian. Like most thoughtful minds of the day, he yearns for some nobler and larger creed than that of the theologians; for a creed which, understanding Nature, shall reconcile it with Nature’s God. Nor may he fairly be called irreverent for talking, Frenchman like, of things spiritual with the same freedom as he would of things temporal. Perhaps in his heart of hearts he has nearly as much religious earnestness as they who call Dr. Colenso an infidel, and

shake their heads at the doubtful theology of Frederic Robertson. At any rate, no translator who should cut or file away so special a feature of French feeling would be doing justice to so marked an original.

For English readers who already know the concise and sober volumes of their countryman, Mr. Wright, the present work will offer mainly an interesting study of the author himself. It is a curious compound of rhapsody and sound reason, of history and romance, of coarse realism and touching poetry, such as, even in France, few save Mr. Michelet could have produced. Founded on truth and close inquiry, it still reads more like a poem than a sober history. As a beautiful speculation, which has nearly, but not quite, grasped the physical causes underlying the whole history of magic and illusion in all ages, it may be read with profit as well as pleasure in this age of vulgar spirit-rapping. But the true history of Witchcraft has yet to be written by some cooler hand.

L.T.

May 11th, 1863.

INTRODUCTION.

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It was said by Sprenger, before the year 1500, "*Heresy of witches*, not of wizards, must we call it, for these latter are of very small account." And by another, in the time of Louis XIII.: "To one wizard, ten thousand witches."

“Witches they are by nature.” It is a gift peculiar to woman and her temperament. By birth a fay, by the regular recurrence of her ecstasy she becomes a sibyl. By her love she grows into an enchantress. By her subtlety, by a roguishness often whimsical and beneficent, she becomes a Witch; she works her spells; does at any rate lull our pains to rest and beguile them.

All primitive races have the same beginning, as so many books of travel have shown. While the man is hunting and fighting, the woman works with her wits, with her imagination: she brings forth dreams and gods. On certain days she becomes a seeress, borne on boundless wings of reverie and desire. The better to reckon up the seasons, she watches the sky; but her heart belongs to earth none the less. Young and flower-like herself, she looks down toward the enamoured flowers, and forms with them a personal acquaintance. As a woman, she beseeches them to heal the objects of her love.

In a way so simple and touching do all religion and all science begin. Ere long everything will get parcelled out; we shall mark the beginning of the professional man as juggler, astrologer, or prophet, necromancer, priest, physician. But at first the woman is everything.

A religion so strong and hearty as that of Pagan Greece begins with the Sibyl to end in the Witch. The former, a lovely maiden in the broad daylight, rocked its cradle, endowed it with a charm and glory of its own. Presently it fell sick, lost itself in the darkness of the Middle Ages, and was hidden away by the Witch in woods and wilds: there, sustained by her compassionate daring, it was made to live

anew. Thus, of every religion woman is the mother, the gentle guardian, the faithful nurse. With her the gods fare like men: they are born and die upon her bosom.

Alas! her loyalty costs her dear. Ye magian queens of Persia; bewitching Circe; sublime Sibyl! Into what have ye grown, and how cruel the change that has come upon you! She who from her throne in the East taught men the virtues of plants and the courses of the stars; who, on her Delphic tripod beamed over with the god of light, as she gave forth her oracle to a world upon its knees;—she also it is whom, a thousand years later, people hunt down like a wild beast; following her into the public places, where she is dishonoured, worried, stoned, or set upon the burning coals!

For this poor wretch the priesthood can never have done with their faggots, nor the people with their insults, nor the children with their stones. The poet, childlike, flings her one more stone, for a woman the cruellest of all. On no grounds whatever, he imagines her to have been always old and ugly. The word “witch” brings before us the frightful old women of *Macbeth*. But their cruel processes teach us the reverse of that. Numbers perished precisely for being young and beautiful.

The Sibyl foretold a fortune, the Witch accomplishes one. Here is the great, the true difference between them. The latter calls forth a destiny, conjures it, works it out. Unlike the Cassandra of old, who awaited mournfully the future she foresaw so well, this woman herself creates the future. Even more than Circe, than Medea, does she bear in her hand the rod of natural miracle, with Nature herself as sister and

helpmate. Already she wears the features of a modern Prometheus. With her industry begins, especially that queen-like industry which heals and restores mankind. As the Sibyl seemed to gaze upon the morning, so she, contrariwise, looks towards the west; but it is just that gloomy west, which long before dawn—as happens among the tops of the Alps—gives forth a flush anticipant of day.

Well does the priest discern the danger, the bane, the alarming rivalry, involved in this priestess of nature whom he makes a show of despising. From the gods of yore she has conceived other gods. Close to the Satan of the Past we see dawning within her a Satan of the Future.

The only physician of the people for a thousand years was the Witch. The emperors, kings, popes, and richer barons had indeed their doctors of Salerno, their Moors and Jews; but the bulk of people in every state, the world as it might well be called, consulted none but the *Saga*, or wise-woman. When she could not cure them, she was insulted, was called a Witch. But generally, from a respect not unmixed with fear, she was called good lady or fair lady (*belle dame—bella donna*[1]), the very name we give to the fairies.

Soon there came upon her the lot which still befalls her favourite plant, belladonna, and some other wholesome poisons which she employed as antidotes to the great plagues of the Middle Ages. Children and ignorant passers-by would curse those dismal flowers before they knew them. Affrighted by their questionable hues, they shrink back, keep far aloof from them. And yet among them are the

comforters (Solaneæ) which, when discreetly employed, have cured so many, have lulled so many sufferings to sleep.

You find them in ill-looking spots, growing all lonely and ill-famed amidst ruins and rubbish-heaps. Therein lies one other point of resemblance between these flowers and her who makes use of them. For where else than in waste wildernesses could live the poor wretch whom all men thus evilly entreated; the woman accursed and proscribed as a poisoner, even while she used to heal and save; as the betrothed of the Devil and of evil incarnate, for all the good which, according to the great physician of the Renaissance, she herself had done? When Paracelsus, at Basle, in 1527, threw all medicine into the fire,[2] he avowed that he knew nothing but what he had learnt from witches.

This was worth a requital, and they got it. They were repaid with tortures, with the stake. For them new punishments, new pangs, were expressly devised. They were tried in a lump; they were condemned by a single word. Never had there been such wastefulness of human life. Not to speak of Spain, that classic land of the faggot, where Moor and Jew are always accompanied by the Witch, there were burnt at Trèves seven thousand, and I know not how many at Toulouse; five hundred at Geneva in three months of 1513; at Wurtzburg eight hundred, almost in one batch, and fifteen hundred at Bamberg; these two latter being very small bishoprics! Even Ferdinand II., the savage Emperor of the Thirty Years' War, was driven, bigot as he was, to keep a watch on these worthy bishops, else they would have burned all their subjects. In the Wurtzburg list I

find one Wizard a schoolboy, eleven years old; a Witch of fifteen: and at Bayonne two, infernally beautiful, of seventeen years.

Mark how, at certain seasons, hatred wields this one word *Witch*, as a means of murdering whom she will. Woman's jealousy, man's greed, take ready hold of so handy a weapon. Is such a one wealthy? *She is a Witch.* Is that girl pretty? *She is a Witch.* You will even see the little beggar-woman, La Murgui, leave a death-mark with that fearful stone on the forehead of a great lady, the too beautiful dame of Lancinena.

The accused, when they can, avert the torture by killing themselves. Remy, that excellent judge of Lorraine, who burned some eight hundred of them, crows over this very fear. "So well," said he, "does my way of justice answer, that of those who were arrested the other day, sixteen, without further waiting, strangled themselves forthwith."

Over the long track of my History, during the thirty years which I have devoted to it, this frightful literature of witchcraft passed to and fro repeatedly through my hands. First I exhausted the manuals of the Inquisition, the asinine foolings of the Dominicans. (*Scourges*, *Hammers*, *Ant-hills*, *Floggings*, *Lanterns*, &c., are the titles of their books.) Next, I read the Parliamentarists, the lay judges who despised the monks they succeeded, but were every whit as foolish themselves. One word further would I say of them here: namely, this single remark, that, from 1300 to 1600, and yet later, but one kind of justice may be seen. Barring a small interlude in the Parliament of Paris, the same stupid

savagery prevails everywhere, at all hours. Even great parts are of no use here. As soon as witchcraft comes into question, the fine-natured De Lancre, a Bordeaux magistrate and forward politician under Henry IV., sinks back to the level of a Nider, a Sprenger; of the monkish ninnies of the fifteenth century.

It fills one with amazement to see these different ages, these men of diverse culture, fail in taking the least step forward. Soon, however, you begin clearly to understand how all were checked alike, or let us rather say blinded, made hopelessly drunk and savage, by the poison of their guiding principle. That principle lies in the statement of a radical injustice: “On account of one man all are lost; are not only punished but worthy of punishment; *depraved and perverted beforehand*, dead to God even before their birth. The very babe at the breast is damned.”

Who says so? Everyone, even Bossuet himself. A leading doctor in Rome, Spina, a Master of the Holy Palace, formulates the question neatly: “Why does God suffer the innocent to die?—For very good reasons: even if they do not die on account of their own sins, they are always liable to death as guilty of the original sin.” (*De Strigibus*, ch. 9.)

From this atrocity spring two results, the one pertaining to justice, the other to logic. The judge is never at fault in his work: the person brought before him is certainly guilty, the more so if he makes a defence. Justice need never beat her head, or work herself into a heat, in order to distinguish the truth from the falsehood. Everyhow she starts from a foregone conclusion. Again, the logician, the schoolman, has only to analyse the soul, to take count of the shades it

passes through, of its manifold nature, its inward strifes and battles. He had no need, as we have, to explain how that soul may grow wicked step by step. At all such niceties and groping efforts, how, if even he could understand them, would he laugh and wag his head! And, oh! how gracefully then would quiver those splendid ears which deck his empty skull!

Especially in treating of the *compact with the Devil*, that awful covenant whereby, for the poor profit of one day, the spirit sells itself to everlasting torture, we of another school would seek to trace anew that road accursed, that frightful staircase of mishaps and crimes, which had brought it to a depth so low. Much, however, cares our fine fellow for all that! To him soul and Devil seem born for each other, insomuch that on the first temptation, for a whim, a desire, a passing fancy, the soul will throw itself at one stroke into so horrible an extremity.

Neither do I find that the moderns have made much inquiry into the moral chronology of witchcraft. They cling too much to the connection between antiquity and the Middle Ages; connection real indeed, but slight, of small importance. Neither from the magician of old, nor the seeress of Celts and Germans, comes forth the true Witch. The harmless “Sabasies” (from Bacchus Sabasius), and the petty rural “Sabbath” of the Middle Ages, have nothing to do with the Black Mass of the fourteenth century, with the grand defiance then solemnly given to Jesus. This fearful conception never grew out of a long chain of tradition. It leapt forth from the horrors of the day.

At what date, then, did the Witch first appear? I say unfalteringly, “In the age of despair:” of that deep despair which the gentry of the Church engendered. Unfalteringly do I say, “The Witch is a crime of their own achieving.”

I am not to be taken up short by the excuses which their sugary explanations seem to furnish. “Weak was that creature, and giddy, and pliable under temptation. She was drawn towards evil by her lust.” Alas! in the wretchedness, the hunger of those days, nothing of that kind could have ruffled her even into a hellish rage. An amorous woman, jealous and forsaken, a child hunted out by her step-mother, a mother beaten by her son (old subjects these of story), if such as they were ever tempted to call upon the Evil Spirit, yet all this would make no Witch. These poor creatures may have called on Satan, but it does not follow that he accepted them. They are still far, ay, very far from being ripe for him. They have not yet learned to hate God.

For the better understanding of this point, you should read those hateful registers which remain to us of the Inquisition, not only in the extracts given by Llorente, by Lamothe-Langon, &c., but in what remains of the original registers of Toulouse. Read them in all their flatness, in all their dryness, so dismal, so terribly savage. At the end of a few pages you feel yourself stricken with a chill; a cruel shiver fastens upon you; death, death, death, is traceable in every line. Already you are in a bier, or else in a stone cell with mouldy walls. Happiest of all are the killed. The horror of horrors is the *In pace*. This phrase it is which comes back unceasingly, like an ill-omened bell sounding again and

again the heart’s ruin of the living dead: always we have the same word, “Immured.”

Frightful machinery for crushing and flattening; most cruel press for shattering the soul! One turn of the screw follows another, until, all breathless, and with a loud crack, it has burst forth from the machine and fallen into the unknown world.

On her first appearance the Witch has neither father nor mother, nor son, nor husband, nor family. She is a marvel, an aerolith, alighted no one knows whence. Who, in Heaven’s name, would dare to draw near her?

Her place of abode? It is in spots impracticable, in a forest of brambles, on a wild moor where thorn and thistle intertwining forbid approach. The night she passes under an old cromlech. If anyone finds her there, she is isolated by the common dread; she is surrounded, as it were, by a ring of fire.

And yet—would you believe it?—she is a woman still. This very life of hers, dreadful though it be, tightens and braces her woman’s energy, her womanly electricity. Hence, you may see her endowed with two gifts. One is the *inspiration of lucid frenzy*, which in its several degrees, becomes poesy, second-sight, depth of insight, cunning simplicity of speech, the power especially of believing in yourself through all your delusions. Of such a gift the man, the wizard, knows nothing. On his side no beginning would have been made.

From this gift flows that other, the sublime power of *unaided conception*, that parthenogenesis which our physiologists have come to recognise, as touching fruitfulness of the body in the females of several species;

and which is not less a truth with regard to the conceptions of the spirit.

By herself did she conceive and bring forth—what? A second self, who resembles her in his self-delusions. The son of her hatred, conceived upon her love; for without love can nothing be created. For all the alarm this child gave her, she has become so well again, is so happily engrossed with this new idol, that she places it straightway upon her altar, to worship it, yield her life up to it, and offer herself up as a living and perfect sacrifice. Very often she will even say to her judge, “There is but one thing I fear; that I shall not suffer enough for him.”—(*Lancre.*)

Shall I tell you what the child’s first effort was? It was a fearful burst of laughter. Has he not cause for mirth on his broad prairie, far away from the Spanish dungeons and the “immured” of Toulouse? The whole world is his *In pace*. He comes, and goes, and walks to and fro. His is the boundless forest, his the desert with its far horizons, his the whole earth, in the fulness of its teeming girdle. The Witch in her tenderness calls him “*Robin mine*,” the name of that bold outlaw, the joyous Robin Hood, who lived under the green bowers. She delights too in calling him fondly by such names as *Little Green*, *Pretty-Wood*, *Greenwood*; after the little madcap’s favourite haunts. He had hardly seen a thicket when he took to playing the truant.[3]

What astounds one most is, that at one stroke the Witch should have achieved an actual Being. He bears about him

every token of reality. We have heard and seen him; anyone could draw his likeness.

The Saints, those darling sons of the house, with their dreams and meditations make but little stir; *they look forward waitingly*, as men assured of their part in Elysium. What little energy they have is all centred in the narrow round of *Imitation*; a word which condenses the whole of the Middle Ages. He on the other hand—this accursed bastard whose only lot is the scourge—has no idea of waiting. He is always seeking and will never rest. He busies himself with all things between earth and heaven. He is exceedingly curious; will dig, dive, ferret, and poke his nose everywhere. At the *consummatum est* he only laughs, the little scoffer! He is always saying “Further,” or “Forward.” Moreover, he is not hard to please. He takes every rebuff; picks up every windfall. For instance, when the Church throws out nature as impure and doubtworthy, Satan fastens on her for his own adornment. Nay, more; he employs her, and makes her useful to him as the fountain-head of the arts; thus accepting the awful name with which others would brand him; to wit, the *Prince of the World*.

Some one rashly said, “Woe to those who laugh.” Thus from the first was Satan intrusted with too pretty a part; he had the sole right of laughing, and of declaring it an *amusement*—rather let us say *a necessity*; for laughing is essentially a natural function. Life would be unbearable if we could not laugh, at least in our afflictions.

Looking on life as nothing but a trial, the Church is careful not to prolong it. Her medicine is resignation, the looking for and the hope of death. A broad field this for

Satan! He becomes the physician, the healer of the living. Better still, he acts as comforter: he is good enough to shew us our dead, to call up the shades of our beloved.

One more trifle the Church rejected, namely, logic or free reason. Here was a special dainty, to which *the other* greedily helped himself. The Church had carefully builded up a small *In pace*, narrow, low-roofed, lighted by one dim opening, a mere cranny. That was called *The School*. Into it were turned loose a few shavelings, with this commandment, “Be free.” They all fell lame. In three or four centuries the paralysis was confirmed, and Ockham’s standpoint is the very same as Abélard’s.[4]

It is pleasant to track the Renaissance up to such a point. The Renaissance took place indeed, but how? Through the Satanic daring of those who pierced the vault, through the efforts of the damned who were bent on seeing the sky. And it took place yet more largely away from the schools and the men of letters, in the *School of the Bush*, where Satan had set up a class for the Witch and the shepherd.

Perilous teaching it was, if so it happened; but the very dangers of it heightened the eager passion, the uncontrollable yearning to see and to know. Thus began those wicked sciences, physic debarred from poisoning, and that odious anatomy. There, along with his survey of the heavens, the shepherd who kept watch upon the stars applied also his shameful nostrums, made his essays upon the bodies of animals. The Witch would bring out a corpse stolen from the neighbouring cemetery; and, for the first time, at risk of being burned, you might gaze upon that heavenly wonder, “which men”—as M. Serres has well said

—“are foolish enough to bury, instead of trying to understand.”

Paracelsus, the only doctor whom Satan admitted there, saw yet a third worker, who, stealing at times into that dark assembly, displayed there his surgical art. This was the surgeon of those happy days, the headsman stout of hand, who could play patly enough with the fire, could break bones and set them again; who if he killed, would sometimes save, by hanging one only for a certain time.

By the more sacrilegious of its essays this convict university of witches, shepherds, and headsmen, emboldened the other, obliged its rival to study. For everyone wanted to live. The Witch would have got hold of everything: people would for ever have turned their backs on the doctor. And so the Church was fain to suffer, to countenance these crimes. She avowed her belief in *good poisons* (Grillandus). She found herself driven and constrained to allow of public dissections. In 1306 one woman, in 1315 another, was opened and dissected by the Italian Mondino. Here was a holy revelation, the discovery of a greater world than that of Christopher Columbus! Fools shuddered or howled; but wise men fell upon their knees.

With such conquests the Devil was like enough to live on. Never could the Church alone have put an end to him. The stake itself was useless, save for some political objects.

Men had presently the wit to cleave Satan’s realm in twain. Against the Witch, his daughter, his bride, they armed his son, the doctor. Heartily, utterly as the Church loathed the latter, yet to extinguish the Witch, she

established his monopoly nevertheless. In the fourteenth century she proclaimed, that any woman who dared to heal others *without having duly studied*, was a witch and should therefore die.

But how was she to study in public? Fancy what a scene of mingled fun and horror would have occurred, if the poor savage had risked an entrance into the schools! What games and merry-makings there would have been! On Midsummer Day they used to chain cats together and burn them in the fire. But to tie up a Witch in that hell of caterwaulers, a Witch yelling and roasting, what fun it would have been for that precious crew of monklings and cowlbearers!

In due time we shall see the decline of Satan. Sad to tell, we shall find him pacified, turned into *a good old fellow*. He will be robbed and plundered, until of the two masks he wore at the Sabbath, the dirtiest is taken by Tartuffe. His spirit is still everywhere, but of his bodily self, in losing the Witch he lost all. The wizards were only wearisome.

Now that we have hurled him so far downwards, are we fully aware of what has happened? Was he not an important actor, an essential item in the great religious machine just now slightly out of gear? All organisms that work properly are twofold, twosided. Life can otherwise not go on at all. It is a kind of balance between two forces, opposite, symmetrical, but unequal; the lower answering to the other as its counterpoise. The higher chafes at it, seeks to put it down. So doing, it is all wrong.

When Colbert, in 1672, got rid of Satan, with very little ceremony, by forbidding the judges to entertain pleas of

witchcraft, the sturdy Parliament of Normandy with its sound Norman logic pointed out the dangerous drift of such a decision. The Devil is nothing less than a dogma holding on to all the rest. If you meddle with the Eternally Conquered, are you not meddling with the Conqueror likewise? To doubt the acts of the former, leads to doubting the acts of the second, the miracles he wrought for the very purpose of withstanding the Devil. The pillars of heaven are grounded in the Abyss. He who thoughtlessly removes that base infernal, may chance to split up Paradise itself.

Colbert could not listen, having other business to mind. But the Devil perhaps gave heed and was comforted. Amidst such minor means of earning a livelihood as spirit-rapping or table-turning, he grows resigned, and believes at least that he will not die alone.

Footnote

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[1] Whence our old word *Beldam*, the more courteous meaning of which is all but lost in its ironical one.—TRANS.

[2] Alluding to the bonfire which Paracelsus, as professor of medicine, made of the works of Galen and Avicenna.—TRANS.

[3] Here, as in some other passages, the play of words in the original is necessarily lost.—TRANS.

[4] Abélard flourished in the twelfth, William of Ockham (pupil of Duns Scotus) in the fourteenth century.—TRANS.

BOOK I.

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CHAPTER I.

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THE DEATH OF THE GODS.

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CERTAIN authors have declared that, shortly before the triumph of Christianity, a voice mysterious ran along the shores of the Ægean Sea, crying, “Great Pan is dead!” The old universal god of nature was no more; and great was the joy thereat. Men fancied that with the death of nature temptation itself was dead. After the troublings of so long a storm, the soul of man was at length to find rest.

Was it merely a question touching the end of that old worship, its overthrow, and the eclipse of old religious rites? By no means. Consult the earliest Christian records, and in every line you may read the hope, that nature is about to vanish, life to be extinguished; that the end of the world, in short, is very near. It is all over with the gods of life, who have spun out its mockeries to such a length. Everything is falling, breaking up, rushing down headlong. The whole is becoming as nought: “Great Pan is dead!”

It was nothing new that the gods must perish. Many an ancient worship was grounded in that very idea. Osiris, Adonis die indeed in order to rise again. On the stage itself, in plays which were only acted for the feast days of the gods, Æschylus expressly averred by the mouth of Prometheus, that some day they should suffer death: but how? As conquered and laid low by the Titans, the ancient powers of nature.

Here, however, things are quite otherwise. Alike in generals and particulars, in the past and the future, would the early Christians have cursed Nature herself. So utterly did they condemn her, as to find the Devil incarnate in a flower. Swiftly may the angels come again, who erst overwhelmed the cities of the Dead Sea! Oh, that they may sweep off, may crumple up as a veil the hollow frame of this world; may at length deliver the saints from their long trial!

The Evangelist said, “The day is coming:” the Fathers, “It is coming immediately.” From the breaking-up of the Empire and the invasion of the Barbarians, St. Augustin draws the hope that very soon no city would remain but the city of God.

And yet, how hard of dying is the world; how stubbornly bent on living! Like Hezekiah, it begs a respite, one turn more of the dial. Well, then, be it so until the year one thousand. But thereafter, not one day.

Are we quite sure of what has been so often repeated, that the gods of old had come to an end, themselves wearied and sickened of living; that they were so disheartened as almost to send in their resignation; that Christianity had only to blow upon these empty shades?

They point to the gods in Rome; they point out those in the Capitol, admitted there only by a kind of preliminary death, on the surrender, I might say, of all their local pith; as having disowned their country, as having ceased to be the representative spirits of the nations. In order to receive them, indeed, Rome had performed on them a cruel operation: they were enervated, bleached. Those great

centralized deities became in their official life the mournful functionaries of the Roman Empire. But the decline of that Olympian aristocracy had in no wise drawn down the host of home-born gods, the mob of deities still keeping hold of the boundless country-sides, of the woods, the hills, the fountains; still intimately blended with the life of the country. These gods abiding in the heart of oaks, in waters deep and rushing, could not be driven therefrom.

Who says so? The Church. She rudely gainsays her own words. Having proclaimed their death, she is indignant because they live. Time after time, by the threatening voice of her councils[5] she gives them notice of their death—and lo! they are living still.

“They are devils.”—Then they must be alive. Failing to make an end of them, men suffer the simple folk to clothe, to disguise them. By the help of legends they come to be baptized, even to be foisted upon the Church. But at least they are converted? Not yet. We catch them stealthily subsisting in their own heathen character.

Where are they? In the desert, on the moor, in the forest? Ay; but, above all, in the house. They are kept up by the most intimate household usages. The wife guards and hides them in her household things, even in her bed. With her they have the best place in the world, better than the temple,—the fireside.

Never was revolution so violent as that of Theodosius. Antiquity shows no trace of such proscription of any worship. The Persian fire-worshipper might, in the purity of his heroism, have insulted the visible deities, but he let

them stand nevertheless. He greatly favoured the Jews, protecting and employing them. Greece, daughter of the light, made merry with the gods of darkness, the tunbellied Cabiri; but yet she bore with them, adopted them as workmen, even to shaping out of them her own Vulcan. Rome in her majesty welcomed not only Etruria, but even the rural gods of the old Italian labourer. She persecuted the Druids, but only as the centre of a dangerous national resistance.

Christianity conquering sought and thought to slay the foe. It demolished the schools, by proscribing logic and uprooting the philosophers, whom Valens slaughtered. It razed or emptied the temples, shivered to pieces the symbols. The new legend would have been propitious to the family, had the father not been cancelled in Saint Joseph; had the mother been set up as an educatress, as having morally brought forth Jesus. A fruitful road there was, but abandoned at the very outset through the effort to attain a high but barren purity.

So Christianity turned into that lonely path where the world was going of itself; the path of a celibacy in vain opposed by the laws of the emperors. Down this slope it was hurled headlong by the establishment of monkery.

But in the desert was man alone? The Devil kept him company with all manner of temptations. He could not help himself, he was driven to create anew societies, nay whole cities of anchorites. We all know those dismal towns of monks which grew up in the Thebaid; how wild, unruly a spirit dwelt among them; how deadly were their descents on

Alexandria. They talked of being troubled, beset by the Devil; and they told no lie.

A huge gap was made in the world; and who was to fill it? The Christians said, The Devil, everywhere the Devil: *ubique dæmon*.[6]

Greece, like all other nations, had her *energumens*, who were sore tried, possessed by spirits. The relation there is quite external; the seeming likeness is really none at all. Here we have no spirits of any kind: they are but black children of the Abyss, the ideal of waywardness. Thenceforth we see them everywhere, those poor melancholics, loathing, shuddering at their own selves. Think what it must be to fancy yourself double, to believe in that *other*, that cruel host who goes and comes and wanders within you, making you roam at his pleasure among deserts, over precipices! You waste and weaken more and more; and the weaker grows your wretched body, the more is it worried by the devil. In woman especially these tyrants dwell, making her blown and swollen. They fill her with an infernal *wind*, they brew in her storms and tempests, play with her as the whim seizes them, drive her to wickedness, to despair.

And not ourselves only, but all nature, alas! becomes demoniac. If there is a devil in the flower, how much more in the gloomy forest! The light we think so pure teems with children of the night. The heavens themselves—O blasphemy!—are full of hell. That divine morning star, whose glorious beams not seldom lightened a Socrates, an Archimedes, a Plato, what is it now become? A devil, the