

them, to the judgment of the people; they declared that the scriptures were to be interpreted, not by the authority which Christ has established, but by each individual; they proclaimed the principle of private judgment in matters of faith, and thereby established a maxim which struck at the root of all authority, and consequently of all order, all religion, and all society. But man is not always consistent with himself—he recoils from the consequences of his own principles—he sows the seeds, but is too often ignorant or reckless of the fruits which future generations must reap. After having proclaimed a principle subversive of all ecclesiastical authority, the reformers of the sixteenth century endeavoured to form separate sects of their own—each was desirous of establishing his own authority on the ruins of the papacy; but the principle which had served for the destruction of the ancient faith, was not equally favourable to the establishment of a new religion. They had left the high ground to build upon a marshy soil—the solid earth for the treacherous quicksand; and it was easy to foresee the fate of their enterprise. Yet the principle of obedience is so natural to the heart of man, in despite of all his corruption, authority in matters of religion is so conformable to his nature, and such is the tenacity with which he clings to opinions which he has once conceived, that it was long ere the human mind deduced the ultimate consequences from the fundamental principle of the Reformation; and the deluded multitude, which had refused to obey its legitimate pastors, long blindly followed the guidance of those ambitious demagogues that had proclaimed the principle of anarchy only to promote the establishment of their own despotism. But, on the other hand, minds of superior penetration and sagacity anticipated the slow march of vulgar intellect—they rejected, one by one, all the doctrines of Christianity; and, leading the way in error, plunged at last into the gulf of universal scepticism, the last and fatal term, where all the doctrines of the Reformation terminate.

To convince ourselves of the truth of these observations, we need only turn our eyes over the page of history. We shall there see that to the heresies of Luther, Calvin, and to the first reformers, the dangerous system of Socinus, that last and feeble partition between Christianity and Deism, soon succeeded to swell and aggravate the evils of Christendom. The sixteenth century had not closed, when a sect of Deists had already made its appearance in Germany; and at the commencement of the seventeenth, Lord Herbert of Cherbury, in England, gave such a shape and form to the doctrines of Deism, that he has been called, by the most profound and eloquent writer of our age, "The patriarch of modern Deists." The patriarch had soon a multitude of followers, especially in his own country, where the bitterness of religious feuds was aggravated by the violence of political dissensions, and where the disastrous revolution, which, by occasioning the downfall of the monarchy and Episcopal Church of England, burst asunder

all the bonds of moral constraint and civil subordination, and soon fostered a general spirit of pride, turbulence, and independence in the minds of men.

It is unnecessary to point out the swarm of frivolous, obscure, and profligate Deists that infested this country during the Commonwealth and the reigns immediately subsequent. The tide of immorality and irreligion which overflowed the country during the reign of the second Charles, has been artfully represented by the enemies of monarchy as a consequence of the restoration; but those writers would do well to consider that the most pernicious consequences of revolution are not immediately perceptible; that the great convulsions which ordinarily accompany them, such as civil and foreign wars, the sanguinary tyranny of factions, the confiscation of property, the proscriptions of individuals, and even of classes, are indeed great and awful calamities; but perhaps are not so pernicious as those moral consequences which ensue—that prostration of justice—that confusion of the principles of right and wrong—that fatal legacy of pernicious doctrines of every sort which those revolutions bequeathed to a posterity already too corrupt, or too feeble to renounce the deadly inheritance.

Hobbes, Shaftesbury, and Bolingbroke, successively continued the work which Lord Herbert of Cherbury had commenced. A crowd of writers, more or less obscure, followed the standard of these celebrated champions of infidelity; and it was from their arsenal that Voltaire and most of the French sophists of the eighteenth century derived the weapons for their anti-Christian warfare. "Boyle," says the illustrious writer whom we have before cited,\* "Boyle, who first introduced infidelity into France, was a Protestant, and Rousseau, born a Protestant, has only given a more complete development to the principles of Protestantism." Such is the sad and melancholy origin of modern infidelity. We are aware that certain Protestant writers, ashamed of this disgraceful genealogy, have ascribed the origin of modern Deism to other sources; that they have asserted its existence previous to the reformation, and have affected even to deduce its origin from Catholic Italy, and thus indirectly throw the infamy of its birth upon Catholicism itself. A little reflection will show the futility of this objection. In the first place, we do not maintain that infidelity was entirely unknown in the period anterior to the reformation; but we maintain that it was of a character too partial and too limited to produce any important consequences on society. Secondly, it is very true that an abuse of the scholastic philosophy had produced rare and occasional instances of infidelity in the middle ages; it is very true that, at the end of the fifteenth century, a sort of practical epicureanism and indifference for religion began to shew itself among the upper classes in Italy, when the democratic tyranny of her petty republics, the frequent revolutions those states underwent, and the violent and sanguinary wars which they waged with each other

had tended to corrupt morals, degrade feeling, and relax the springs, not only of political and international justice, but even of private honour and integrity. But at this period, as in the early middle ages, infidelity had to contend with a formidable and uncompromising foe in the predominant religion; the feeble and partial influence of irreligion never extended much beyond the schools; at all events, that influence was not, as afterwards, fostered and encouraged by a religion which left the human mind, alone and unassisted, a prey to its own evil suggestions, and the attacks of unprincipled sophistry. But to return to our subject. We have seen the rise and gradual progress of modern infidelity. We have seen how it emerged, by degrees, from the reformation, assumed a certain shape and consistency in England, and thence spread its roots into France. To follow its growth and development in these countries, to point out its fatal influence on morals and on society, forms not the object of our present inquiry. Our attention must be confined solely to Germany. It was not to be expected that the progress of the Reformation was to be every where the same—and that particular sects and particular countries which had embraced its principles, should not advance more rapidly than others in the career of error and innovation which that revolution had opened. Thus the church of England, which had preserved the episcopal hierarchy, a close connexion with the state, and great wealth and immunities, possessed greater barriers against innovation than the Protestant churches of Germany where these advantages did not exist. There the naturally bold and speculative spirit of the German might range from system to system, from theory to theory, uncontrolled by episcopal authority, and the bond of political interests.

It is true that infidelity had a more early and rapid development in England than in Germany; but in a church which had preserved along with the civil immunities and temporal possessions of the ancient clergy, much of their ecclesiastical discipline and government, infidelity had to sustain a more vigorous opposition than in the German churches, with their feeble discipline and their Presbyterian government.

The Protestant churches of Germany, though, like those of other countries, they had at various periods wavered and varied in their doctrines, remained on the whole, tolerably faithful to the principles of their founders, and their ancient symbols and formularies of faith, until the middle of the last century, when, with the memorable reign of Frederic II., there began a new epoch, not only in German history and German literature, but in German manners and German modes of thinking. The philosophy of the eighteenth century, which had established the seat and centre of its operations in France, acquired towards this period greater strength and audacity, and extended its ravages through every country in Europe. Some Theologians in Protestant Germany, attacked it with vigour and boldness; others endeavoured vainly to conciliate the principles of this sophistical philosophy with those of

\* *L'Abbe de la Mennais Essai sur l'indifference*, vol. i.

\* *Essai sur l'indifference en matiere de religion*, vol. i.