

MOSES AND THE MAHDI.

At the present time when the civilised world appears to be standing on the brink of a mighty convulsion, and nations watch with anxious and bated breath the costly preparations now being made for a fierce and sanguinary war between two professed Christian races, on the one hand; while upon the other we see a not less bloody conflict destroying life and treasure in the name of civilization and of God, my mind naturally turns to the consideration of the causes underlying all this inhuman thirst for power. And the more I study and examine the facts of history the stronger becomes my conviction, that Monotheism and a belief in the power of Jehovah, Jah, as taught by Moses, is the chief root of all the evil. As the stream first flowed from the East, so we see it rolling back to the source from whence it came. Nor is the present the only time that Yahvehistic ferocity has rolled its purple tide of death and suffering, from West to East. From Palestine through Greece and Rome the spirit of Judaism, more or less modified by the teachings of Christ, and of Saul of Tarsus, permeated the whole of Europe, enforcing a belief in the God of Israel by persecution, imprisonment and death; until Peter the Hermit arose, like another Moses, or a Mahdi, to stir up the spirit of fanaticism, and in the name of Jehovah to spread misery and carnage through the land, and under the banners of the Crusaders, so-called Christians from the West, carried the game of blood into Asia. If the mind were not overawed by the horror of the scenes recorded in history, it would be most ludicrous to picture this God of Hosts, smiling, from his exalted throne, on the mummeries performed by his creatures here below. Christian priests and prelates pray to him for victory, and pompously consecrate the banners of the Christian Army. At the same time from Mosque and Minaret the Moslem prays for victory also, and loudly proclaims his faith in Allah, the same God be it observed whom the Mahomedan believes the Jews and Christians have dishonoured by not accepting the mission of the Arabian Prophet. Thus the world, swayed by contending superstitions, scrambles on through the stream of time, and the time-worn story of old repeats itself. As Moses led the barbarous hordes of the Jewish race against the unoffending tribes and peaceful villages of Syria, so the Mahdi to-day seeks to drive out the "dogs of infidels" who have carried death and misery into his land. Should Great Britain and Russia come to blows the same religious farces will be performed; Anglican Bishops and Patriarchs of the Russo-Greek Church will invoke Jehovah's aid and ask his blessing. There is good reason too for the opinion that religious zeal has as much or more to do with Russia's thirst for dominion, as the lust for secular power and the greed of gain, for a more priest-ridden country it is hard to conceive. Alas! experience teaches, that the greed of gain is generally the Alpha and Omega of the motive power to man's ambition. Love of country may awaken the enthusiasm of the young—and the love of God sustain his zeal in more mature age, though glimpses of wealth, as the reward of patriotism, may give additional lustre to the hopes of the youthful; the sordid desire for wealth crowns the whole and blots all humanity. All this is done in the name of God and "true religion." We talk of civilization, as though it were a fact, while every phase of barbarism seeks to establish itself by the logic of the sword. As every man believes his own goose to be a swan so I may presume every nation sets up its own, as the standard of civilization, as every Church proclaims itself the only door to Heaven. As a true-born Briton I naturally believe that British civilization is better than Russian, German, or even French, and as a matter of course infinitely superior to that of Northern Africa, as it exists in Egypt or the Soudan, and is exemplified by the Mahdi or Osman Digna, though had I been born a Soudanese, I should probably think otherwise. There is an inherent conservatism in human nature; as children and weak-minded people object to taking medicine to make them well, so we find all sorts and conditions of men object to the introduction of reforms

to make them better. I, as a Freethinker, am opposed to Christianity. As a Protestant, I was opposed to Popery—and were I a Roman Catholic, I should be opposed to Mahomedanism. The Moslem hates us all, and in the blind delirium of fanatic zeal seeks to assert the sovereignty of his God and his Prophet by an appeal to arms. I am free to confess that I have seen the day when a touch of "Ould Donnybrook,"—a wee taste of a scrimmage, afforded me infinite delight, but the experience of age and the teachings of philosophy make me the advocate of peace—but not "at any price." I abhor bloodshed, and look upon war as an unmitigated evil; but I also hold that there is a greater evil—slavery. Not only that of the body, but that of the mind. Hence the justification of war, as repelling force by force. Thus we see that all the various believers in Jehovah, from Moses to the Mahdi, and all the dupes of the various mysteries that have gathered round the name of the God of Israel, have from time to time struggled for the mastery. Protestantism as it exists in Great Britain, in these colonies, and in America, is, from my point of view, the least objectionable of Yahvehistic creeds, its foundation stone is "the right of private judgment," and that has become the keystone of the arch of liberty. The Medes and Persians carried the children of Judah captive, and saved the world from Mosaic ignorance and mental bondage. I need not dwell upon the change wrought by Greek philosophy—Mahomet's fiery zeal or Roman despotism, which last, by its own arbitrary power, produced the Schisms from which modern Protestantism has sprung. They each have played their part in the world's history—and to-day the justification of Great Britain's warlike attitude is to be found in the necessity of Protestant liberalism stemming the aggressive conservatism of older superstitions. We cannot have things as we wish, we must perforce accept them as they are. Trial by battle appears to be the ordeal through which civilization must inevitably pass, whether disturbed by a Czar, a Moses, or a Mahdi.

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— A FAITHLESS WORLD. —

In a recent number of the 'Contemporary Review,' Miss Frances Power Cobbe contributes an interesting article under the above heading. This estimable lady and accomplished writer essays a conclusive answer to Mr. Justice Stephen's opinion that we can get on very well without what is termed religion, and that it matters not whether there is or is not a God or a future state. In concluding an article in the 'Nineteenth Century,' this able and distinguished lawyer expressed his views of life and duty so pleasantly as to lead us to suppose that he is happily one who would choose to see us all through life with more songs than sighs. "This world seems to me a very good world," remarked Mr. Justice Stephens, "if it would only last. Love, friendship, ambition, science, literature, politics, commerce, professions, trades, and a thousand other matters, will go equally well, as far as I can see, whether there is or is not a God or a future state." To this Miss Cobbe shrinks back in trepidation and dismay, and valued friend to liberal religious thought though this lady is, it is evident that she lacks entire faith in human nature to attain every requisite for human progress and welfare. Advocates of "reverent freethought" terrify themselves with lurid pictures of "an orphan world without the consciousness of God," and leave everything realizable on this nether earth to wander in dreamland at their own sweet will. In criticising Mr. Justice Stephens, it is very commendable that Miss Cobbe should begin by defining her words. To Miss Cobbe, "religion" means definite faith in a living and righteous God; and, as a corollary, in the survival of the human soul after death. From this definition, therefore, it is evident that sacerdotal laws and theological morality have not yet been discarded by the devout author of "Religious Duty;" and from