

Chapter III

First Article Of The Creed

Translated From The French By MRS. J. Sadlier.
Anecdotes Pamphlet No.ca006

I Believe in God the Father Almighty, Creator of Heaven and Earth.

I. - THERE IS A GOD.

34. The God Baal. - All nations have believed in the existence of the Divinity, but they have not all had a very exact idea of it; they even gave not seldom to their idols the same passions and the same wants which are remarked amongst men. You remember, do you not, the manner in which the prophet Elias (or Elijah) overcame the priests of Baal? One day he had them brought together to the number of four hundred and fifty, and he said to them before all the people: "How long will you halt between two sides? If the Lord be God follow Him ; but if Baal, then follow him? Behold! I only remain a prophet of the Lord: but the prophets of Baal are four hundred and fifty men; do you offer a sacrifice to Baal, and I will offer one to the Lord, - we shall see who will hear his worshippers?" The proposal is accepted; two altars are raised; the idolaters begin first, they sacrifice an ox to Baal and with one voice invoke him, crying, "O Baal, hear us! O Baal, hear us!" They had cried so for several hours and nothing came. Then Elias began to mock them, saying: "Cry Cry with a louder voice ! Perchance your god Baal is talking, or is in an inn, or on a journey or perhaps he is asleep, and must be awaked." And the wretched men cried as loud as they could, and even cut themselves with knives and lancets till they were covered with blood; all in vain, their sacrifice remained cold. At noon, Elias began in his turn. Soon, fire from heaven descended on the altar, consumed the ox which had been placed upon it, and thus proved that the Lord is the only true God. The false prophets of Baal were treated as they deserved and the people of Israel abandoned that gross idolatry. - III Book of Kings, XVIII (In Hebrew Bibles, I Kings chapter 18).

35. The God of Socrates.- The ancient Greeks, who passed for the most enlightened people on earth, did not know as much as you do, my dear young friends, of the most important truths. They imagined that heaven was peopled with a multitude of gods, some great, others small. There was, however, one exception found amongst them. Socrates, that great Athenian philosopher; who lived more than four hundred years before Christ, was convinced, by studying the wonders of nature, and the admirable order that reigns throughout them, that there exists an Almighty Being, endowed with boundless intelligence, creator and preserver of all things. This conviction he endeavoured to infuse into the minds of his disciples. He had long and magnificent conversations with them on this subject, which conversations have been preserved for us by one of the disciples, named Zenophon as well as by Plato. Nevertheless, as Socrates spoke of the Divinity only in the singular, he was accused of slighting the gods of the country, and seducing youth by turning them away from the national religion. Socrates made no very long defence; he contented himself with saying that for thirty years he had never ceased to labour for the good of his fellow citizens, and especially of his disciples. His enemies, incited by the devil, - who was doubtless jealous of seeing this sublime truth

taught, - condemned him to death. He was forced to drink a cup of hemlock, which is a deadly poison, and Socrates died tranquil and resigned. - SCHMID et BELET, Cat. Hist., I. 50.

36. The Idol who has neither Arm nor Head. - Nothing is easier than to make pagans understand the absurdity of a religion which admits a plurality of gods; a child of your age once perfectly convinced them of it. I am sorry I cannot remember his name. He lived in the same house with a very obstinate idolater. He often told him: There is but one God who has created the heavens and the earth; He it is that makes the sun to shine, and the dew and the rain to fall on the fields. But the pagan closed his ears, and would not be converted. One day when he was absent till evening, the child went into the room where he had his idols, and took them all to pieces. He spared only one, the largest, which was probably a statue of the god Jupiter. He placed a stick in his hand and went away, closing the door after him. That night, or the following morn, the pagan entered his private temple. Imagine his rage on seeing the ruin that was there. Who has done this? bring him here, whoever he is! I will kill him! I will sacrifice him on the altar of my outraged gods. It must be that young Christian that lives in the house. "Was it not you that did it?" addressing him when he came. "Why do you ask me that?" said the child with great composure; "don't you see big statue there has a stick still in his hand; it must be he that did all the damage." - "No, that is impossible; the statue could not even move his arm but it was you, wretch! that did it!" - "Well, now, don't be angry," said the child mildly, "if your statue is not even able to do what I have done, and I only a child, how can you believe that he is the God who from nothing made heaven and earth?" The unhappy idolater understood this reasoning, simple though it was, broke the last remaining statue, and, kneeling, adored the true God. - Daily Rewards, XXVIII., 8.

37. Father Kircher's Globe. - A famous German astronomer, Father Kircher, a Jesuit, wishing to convince one of his acquaintances who doubted the existence of a Supreme Being, made use of the following expedient: Just when he was expecting a visit from this gentleman, he caused a magnificent celestial globe to be placed in a corner of the room. Scarcely had the person entered, when he remarked the globe, and asked Father Kircher to whom it belonged. The astronomer replied that it did not belong to him, that it had no owner nor did it appear to have any maker or manufacturer. "Of course," he added, "it must have come there by mere chance". - "You are jesting now," said the visitor. But the Father insisted on it that he was perfectly serious. At last, when he perceived that his visitor began to show some annoyance, he took occasion to address him in these words: "You will not believe, and would even think it foolish to admit, that this little globe exists of itself, and is found by chance in the place where it is founded, and knew not what answer to make to this so simple argument. He saw clearly how absurd it was to attribute to chance the admirable order which reigns throughout the universe. - SCHMID et BELET, Cat. Hist., I., 54.

38. The Savages Believe in a God. - I have just told you that even the most savage nations have a notion of the Divinity. In proof of this I will give you the reasoning of a Greenlander, which was not so bad. Greenland, you know, is situated in the most frozen part of America. In 1721, the Danes, who were masters of the country, sent missionaries thither to preach the Gospel to the pagan inhabitants; several Greenlanders were converted and baptized. One of them was questioned, one day, by a traveller, who appeared surprised that they had lived so long in that state. "Indeed," replied the native, "we were poor and ignorant pagans; we knew nothing of God nor of Jesus Christ. Still you must not suppose that there were none of us to whom that thought of a creator had occurred. For me, I often said to myself: 'A boat with everything belonging to it, does not make itself; it must be constructed with much art, by a skilful workman. But a bird requires infinitely more art than the

finest boat; nobody knows how to make one. But man is far above all other animals put together. Who made him? Whence came the first men? One might think they came from the earth; but why does not the earth produce them now? And the earth, the sea, the sun, the moon, and the stars, how do they exist? Surely somebody has done all that. And whoever did it certainly be endowed with a power, a skill, a wisdom, far superior to those of the most expert man; he must be pre-eminently good, since all he has made is so useful and so advantageous to us.' It was thus we reasoned before you came to teach us the existence of true God." - CRANZ, History of Greenland.

39. An Atheist Viewed Through a Glass. - If you chanced, my young friends, to meet one who said to you "I do not believe in God - I am an atheist," treat him perhaps as did a learned Jesuit father, whose story makes me laugh heartily whenever I think of it. He was called Father Oudin and was born in the diocese of Langres, but resided usually at Dijon. One day there came to see him a dashing young man with a splendid moustache. "Reverend father," said he, "I wish to have a little discussion with you on the subject of religion. I plan to have a good laugh over the matter with my friends over a pot of ale later in the day." "Sir," replied the Jesuit, "I do not care to discuss our sacred truths with any one who treats them as mere food for jests. Whatsoever else, my interest is in the truth and sharing that truth with genuine inquirers; I would rather not speak of them to those whose only object is to ridicule them." "Well, at all events," said the young coxcomb, balancing himself on one foot, "I should wish you to understand that I am an atheist." At these words Father Oudin took hold of an eye-glass and deliberately examined our dandy from head to foot, an arch smile on his countenance. "What is there so strange about me, that you examine me so attentively?" asked at length the young scoffer, who began to feel ill at ease. "Oh it is just because I had never before got sight of the animal they call an atheist and I took the opportunity to see how he is made. Perhaps, I would find that such an animal was not an ORGANISM, or perhaps had no ORGANS, so was therefore incapable recognizing any ORGANIZATION in his make-up and would thus explain why he could not deduce that there was a supreme ORGANIZER. Alas, my close scrutiny has revealed no such disorganized being in this 'atheist' before me." Hearing this, the strong-minded individual made his retreat as fast as he could. - FILASSIER, Dictionnaire d'Education, II., 43.

40. The Atheist Saying his Beads. - I confess to you, children, it is very convenient to play the sceptic and the "free-thinker" when people are well, and every thing is going well with them; but there are moments when, in spite of them, they return to better sentiments. The famous Volney was once on a voyage with some of his friends, off the coast of Maryland, in North America. All at once a great storm arose, and the little bark which bore the flower of the unbelievers of both hemispheres, appeared twenty times on the point of being lost. In this imminent peril every one began to pray; M. de Volney himself snatched a rosary from a good woman near him and began to recite Ave Marias with edifying fervour nor ceased till the danger had passed. Some one approached him when the storm was over and said in a tone of good-natured raillery: "My dear sir, it seems to me that you were praying just now; to whom, pray, did you address yourself, since you maintain that there is no God?" "Ah! my friend," replied the philosopher all ashamed, "one can be a sceptic in his study, but not at sea, in a storm." - NOEL, Catechisme de Rodez, I., 73.

41. The Child who Divines the Existence of God. - I have sometimes told you, my young friends, that the idea of a Divinity is natural to man; God Himself has engraved it on the heart. I shall never forget a curious experiment made in Germany by a man named Sintenis way back in the 1830's. He had lost his wife, whom he tenderly loved, and who had left him but one infant son. He retired to the country, and devoted himself solely to the bringing up of this child, who was his only hope. It

was then that he made the experiment to which I have alluded, and undertook to teach him himself the first elements of all the sciences: reading, writing, geography, natural history, German and Latin grammar, etc. He made it a point to avoid pronouncing before him, or having him read, the holy name of God, of whom no one ever spoke to him, in order to see if that precious knowledge would come of itself. These precautions had been carefully observed till the boy was ten years of age. About that time, Mr Sintenis remarked that his son left his chamber stealthily every morning, and went into the garden, where he offered his homage to the sun. The father, seeing at once how the matter stood took his son aside, and asked him seriously what he was doing. The child frankly acknowledged that for some time past he had been thinking that as all that exists could not possibly be made by themselves alone, he had been anxious to know the author of nature, and at last it seemed to him that it must be the sun, because by his mild light and his salutary influence, he made the crops and vintage, and all fruits, to grow and ripen. Mr. Sintenis lost no time in explaining his error, and making him know the true Author of all things; for himself, he was rejoiced to have acquired the certainty that the idea of the Divinity is almost born with us. - PERE GIRAUD, Magasin pittoresque, Anno 1844, p. 358.

42. The Unbelieving Innkeeper. - Does it not often happen to some of you, my young friends, that when you are taken by surprise in some way, you exclaim unthinkingly - "Oh! my God!" That shows that we believe in God almost involuntarily. Here is a story which goes to prove the fact: An innkeeper, having frequented bad company, had learned all sorts of impiety; he even became an atheist, that is to say, he said that he did not believe in God. Two very decent worthy men once came to him for supper, and from six o'clock in the evening till eleven at night, he never ceased to annoy them with his senseless babble. He wanted to prove to them that there is neither God nor heaven, nor hell. They endeavoured to refute him, calling to their aid the Word of God, but, to everything they advanced, he only replied by mockery and sarcasm. The two friends were touched with compassion, seeing the blindness of this unhappy man. They retired to their respective homes, said their prayers, and went to bed. They had scarce been half an hour asleep, when they were roused by the cry of "Fire! fire!" from the street. It was the inn that was on fire, and the flames were already bursting in livid brightness from the roof. Being woken up by his two recent guests, the owner had no sooner perceived the dreadful havoc going on than he cried with clasped hands: "My God! oh, my God! God Almighty! God of grace and mercy! Have pity on me, and help me!" Here he was suddenly stopped by one of the others, - "How! wretch, you have been denying and blaspheming God all the evening, and you would have Him come now to your assistance! Confess now that there is a God, whom we must adore and serve." - SCHMID et BELET, Cat. Hist., II., 43.
