

## Letter to an Unbeliever

W. Kelly.

(B.T. Vol. N4, p. 351-352.)

30th July, 1903. Dear Mr. N.\*

(\*This letter was the second written to a stranger, an avowed sceptic. Being returned to the writer, as the other was not known to the P.O., it is printed that it may appeal to souls in similar darkness.)

Yours of the 28th was sent on to me here; and I leave on Saturday.

I regret that my letter only interested you. But this cannot surprise one who did not really believe till grace troubled his conscience and made him feel the vanity of his religion after the flesh and the world. Faith in church or chapel is nothing: Christ alone counts.

Bear in mind that revealed truth condemns the world, and must be so unpalatable to men, that one cannot expect their testimony save unwittingly. Yet the Roman remains (for we have no more) testify by the way to the appearance of Christ at the very time when Scripture puts Him in Palestine; and to a new faith in His followers, most offensive to those who loved, or at least sanctioned, the demoralising idolatries of Jupiter, Venus, Mars, and the other imaginary deities, or real demons, the empire honoured. I am away from my library or any books that I could cite. But if you are familiar with the scanty residue of the Latin classics so-called, you will not have forgotten the references in the brief historical works of Tacitus (bitter, haughty, and cynical as he was), or in the Lives of the Caesars by Suetonius, or in the Letters of Pliny the younger from his Bithynian government with the Emperor Trajan's replies. The later scoffing sketches in Greek of Lucian (of Samosata) also bear witness to the facts of Christ's history ("more suo," of the Punch style, or indeed lower still), and notably of His most widely known follower the apostle Paul. It is irrational (taking the ground of nature) to doubt what even these avowed enemies of Christianity attest. The men who then defended traditional and effete Paganism, regarded it as a new and dangerous superstition. That they did write of Christ and of His religion in a hostile spirit is beyond controversy, as then uprising and progressing far and wide. Pilate's act, as crucifying

Him, is disputed neither by Jew nor by Gentile. So that we assuredly have adequate proof of His birth, life, and death from His enemies, confirming the allegations of scripture. Later still, Celsus and Porphyry wrote against Christianity as philosophers. But the outward facts are not disputed; and Christ's allowed miracles are imputed by Gentiles to magic, as the Jews at the time imputed them to Beelzebub.

There were good and necessary reasons why His resurrection could not be seen or attested by outsiders. In general it called for chosen witnesses familiar with Him. Again, how could a Greek, still less a Jew, get over a resurrection? and this predicted at least a thousand years before by David (Ps. 16: 9-11)? Over and over it was announced beforehand to His own disciples; but they never took in so strange an intimation till it was accomplished. To own that fact, at least to believe God in it, is to become a Christian, if one by grace get possessed of heart, conscience, or sound judgment. For Him to be raised as He said, on the third day, was to lay the foundation of the gospel. The God who alone raised Him from among the dead gave in that fact the mightiest proof possible that the world, Jew and Gentile, hated Him whom His unjust judge acquitted yet gave up to the murderous will of Israel. God then and thus vindicated the Man who will come to judge quick and dead. How could any sober man expect unbelieving Jews or Gentiles to record such a wonder to His glory, and to their own necessary

condemnation? Yet thousands of unbelievers were brought to believe, and suffered for their faith unflinchingly.

As to the Bible being the word of God, it speaks to conscience as no other book does, from Genesis to the Revelation; and the variety of the inspired writers only and greatly adds to the wonder. Its existence, if isolated as historically shown from Moses to the Patmos prisoner of Domitian, would not prove its inspiration, as it now does. Miracles were passing evidence; prophecies, deeper and more permanent. But the True and Faithful Witness, Jesus Christ (who stands morally aloof from all men before or after) fills the gap between the O.T. and the New. He is the object to which the Old pointed (though only His humiliation, and His unseen glory be fulfilled, and the visible display of His goodness, power, and glory remains to be, as it surely will). He is the foundation and the substance of which the N.T. is the record; and He sent the Holy Spirit, that the humblest men He chose might convey the record adequately by His power, and that others might profit by faith everlastingly.

Its own internal evidence is at once the plainest, readiest, and most convincing to all those that love the truth. There is just published "God's Inspiration of the Scriptures" (if I may be allowed to speak about a book of mine), in which the most stringent demand of a divine authority, differing essentially from every other writing, is laid down; and this principle of divine design, shown to be palpable in all its parts, is applied to the various books of the O. & N. Testaments. May I ask you to do me the favour of reading what ought to be, unless I deceive myself, more satisfactory than many letters? It is to be had at T. Weston's, 53, Paternoster Row; or to be read at the British Museum, if it be as yet producible at the round Reading-room.

As to the grievously inconsistent state of those who pose as Christians and profess faith (if now indeed this last can be alleged) in scripture as God's word, I can only bow my head, and humbly acknowledge the shame. For what is worse or more shocking than grace abused? But even here a wonderful fact claims attention. The O.T. predicts from first to last the like distressing ruin of the Jews through disobedience and idolatry, crowned by their rejection of the true Messiah. The N.T. no less clearly predicts the shameless ruin of the Christian profession, with true men of God of old and now, walking in faith, humility, and holiness. Both Testaments predicted that the Messiah, the crucified Lord Jesus, will return in glory, and execute judgment on professing Christians and Israel; as also on the nations who still hold to their false gods or their incredulity, apart from both.

Perhaps, dear Sir, you will allow that I have honestly replied to the substance of your letter, as I have no reason to shirk a single point raised. God too will help all who truly look to Him in their need. Since, as a young man, I was enabled to turn my back on the world and on more guilty Christendom, and by grace sought not its favours nor feared its frowns, but decided simply to believe, walk, and worship as Christ's bondman and withal His freedman, I have known true peace and joy in believing here, and I look for what is far, far better for ever with Him. Believe me, dear Mr. N.,

Sincerely your friend and servant for His sake, W. K.