

CHAPTER XCVII

Faith And Knowledge

A thing incredible is about to be related; but a thing may be incredible and still be true; sometimes it is incredible because it is true. And many infidels but disbelieve the least incredible things; and many bigots reject the most obvious. But let us hold fast to all we have; and stop all leaks in our faith; lest an opening, but of a hand's breadth, should sink our seventy-fours. The wide Atlantic can rush in at one port-hole; and if we surrender a plank, we surrender the fleet. Panoplied in all the armor of St. Paul, morion, hauberk, and greaves, let us fight the Turks inch by inch, and yield them naught but our corpse.

But let us not turn round upon friends, confounding them with foes. For dissenters only assent to more than we. Though Milton was a heretic to the creed of Athanasius, his faith exceeded that of Athanasius himself; and the faith of Athanasius that of Thomas, the disciple, who with his own eyes beheld the mark of the nails. Whence it comes that though we be all Christians now, the best of us had perhaps been otherwise in the days of Thomas.

The higher the intelligence, the more faith, and the less credulity: Gabriel rejects more than we, but out-believes us all. The greatest marvels are first truths; and first truths the last unto which we

attain. Things nearest are furthest off. Though your ear be next-door to your brain, it is forever removed from your sight. Man has a more comprehensive view of the moon, than the man in the moon himself. We know the moon is round; he only infers it. It is because we ourselves are in ourselves, that we know ourselves not. And it is only of our easy faith, that we are not infidels throughout; and only of our lack of faith, that we believe what we do.

In some universe-old truths, all mankind are disbelievers. Do you believe that you lived three thousand years ago? That you were at the taking of Tyre, were overwhelmed in Gomorrah? No. But for me, I was at the subsiding of the Deluge, and helped swab the ground, and build the first house. With the Israelites, I fainted in the wilderness; was in court, when Solomon outdid all the judges before him. I, it was, who suppressed the lost work of Manetho, on the Egyptian theology, as containing mysteries not to be revealed to posterity, and things at war with the canonical scriptures; I, who originated the conspiracy against that purple murderer, Domitian; I, who in the senate moved, that great and good Aurelian be emperor. I instigated the abdication of Diocletian, and Charles the Fifth; I touched Isabella's heart, that she hearkened to Columbus. I am he, that from the king's minions hid the Charter in the old oak at Hartford; I harbored Goffe and Whalley: I am the leader of the Mohawk masks, who in the Old Commonwealth's harbor, overboard threw the East India Company's Souchong; I am the Vailed Persian Prophet; I, the man in the iron mask; I, Junius.