



Faith Voltaire

We have long pondered whether or no we should print this article, which we found in an old book. Our respect for St. Peter's see restrained us. But some pious men having convinced us that Pope Alexander VI. had nothing in common with St. Peter, we at last decided to bring this little piece into the light, without scruple.

One day Prince Pico della Mirandola met Pope Alexander VI. at the house of the courtesan Emilia, while Lucretia, the holy father's daughter, was in child-bed, and one did not know in Rome if the child was the Pope's, or his son's the Duke of Valentinois, or Lucretia's husband's, Alphonse of Aragon, who passed for impotent. The conversation was at first very sprightly. Cardinal Bembo records a part of it.

"Little Pic," said the Pope, "who do you think is my grandson's father?"

"Your son-in-law, I think," answered Pic.

"Eh! how can you believe such folly?"

"I believe it through faith."

"But do you not know quite well that a man who is impotent does not make children?"

"Faith consists," returned Pic, "in believing things because they are impossible; and, further, the honour of your house demands that Lucretia's son shall not pass as the fruit of an incest. You make me believe more incomprehensible mysteries. Have I not to be convinced that a serpent spoke, that since then all men have been damned, that Balaam's she-ass also spoke very eloquently, and that the walls of Jericho fell at the sound of trumpets?" Pic forthwith ran through a litany of all the admirable things he believed.

Alexander fell on his sofa by dint of laughing.

"I believe all that like you," he said, "for I know well that only by faith can I be saved, and that I shall not be saved by my works."

"Ah! Holy Father," said Pico, "you have need of neither works nor faith; that is good for poor profane people like us; but you who are vice-god can believe and do all you want to. You have the keys of heaven; and without a doubt St. Peter will not close the door in your face. But for myself, I avow I should need potent protection if, being only a poor prince, I had slept with my daughter, and if I had used the stiletto and the cantarella as often as your Holiness."

Alexander could take a jest. "Let us talk seriously," he said to Prince della Mirandola. "Tell me what merit one can have in telling God that one is persuaded of things of which in fact one cannot be persuaded? What pleasure can that give God? Between ourselves, saying that one believes what is impossible to believe is lying."

Pico della Mirandola made a great sign of the cross. "Eh! paternal God," he cried, "may your Holiness pardon me, you are not a Christian."

"No, by my faith," said the Pope.

"I thought as much," said Pico della Mirandola.

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