



Superstition in All Ages

Jean Meslier

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From the intro:

"Jean Meslier, born 1678, in the village of Mazerny, dependency of the duchy of Rethel, was the son of a serge weaver; brought up in the country, he nevertheless pursued his studies and succeeded to the priesthood. At the seminary, where he lived with much regularity, he devoted himself to the system of Descartes. Becoming curate of Etrepigny in Champagne and vicar of a little annexed parish named Bue, he was remarkable for the austerity of his habits. Devoted in all his duties, every year he gave what remained of his salary to the poor of his parishes; enthusiastic, and of rigid virtue, he was very temperate, as much in regard to his appetite as in relation to women.

MM. Voiri and Delavaux, the one curate of Varq, the other curate of Boulzicourt, were his confessors, and the only ones with whom he associated.

The curate Meslier was a rigid partisan of justice, and sometimes carried his zeal a little too far. The lord of his village, M. de Touilly, having ill-treated some peasants, he refused to pray for him in his service. M. de Mailly, Archbishop of Rheims, before whom the case was brought, condemned him. But the Sunday which followed this decision, the abbot Meslier stood in his pulpit and complained of the sentence of the cardinal. "This is," said he, "the general fate of the poor country priest; the archbishops, who are great lords, scorn them and do not listen to them. Therefore, let us pray for the lord of this place. We will pray for Antoine de Touilly, that he may be converted and granted the grace that he may not wrong the poor and despoil the orphans." His lordship, who was present at this mortifying supplication, brought new complaints before the same archbishop, who ordered the curate Meslier to come to Donchery, where he ill-treated him with abusive language.

There have been scarcely any other events in his life, nor other benefice, than that of Etrepigny. He died in the odor of sanctity in the year 1733, fifty-five years old. It is believed that, disgusted with life, he expressly refused necessary food, because during his sickness he was not willing to take anything, not even a glass of wine."

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