

IMAGINATION AND FAITH.

THE abuse of the imagination is easy, and far-reaching in its consequences. In matters of faith it seems to find its widest, or at least its most serious, inlet playing havoc with the beliefs of many and blocking their way to the Church by throwing false lights and shades upon Catholic doctrine. A priest whose apostolic duties place upon him the guidance of enquirers to the faith has not infrequently to resign himself to long delays on minor points of doctrine or discipline. Again and again, when principles of belief and authority sufficient to cover the entire Catholic system seem to have been fully consented to, the work of catechising comes to a standstill on the catechumen's taking fright and shying at some item of belief already implicitly held in the acceptance of first principles. Moreover, many of those who do not seek admission or instruction in the Catholic faith from a denial of some of its fundamental tenets are open to the charge of being swayed by their imagination to the discredit of their reason.

To take some examples. It is incredible how much abhorrence is felt in certain quarters for the use of images. We have known a guileless and deeply religious soul who confessed to an irresistible feeling of sickness on seeing a priest lead the Rosary from a prie-dieu before Our Blessed Lady's statue. Mr. Kensit and his sympathizers seem to have a genuine distaste for any outward honor paid to the crucifix. Yet, as a recent writer in the *Church Times* has cleverly reminded them, on taking an oath in court it is the custom to kiss the Bible. With Catholic controversialists it is a commonplace when disputing on this point to urge the genuflexions and bowing and elaborate marks of honor paid to sovereigns. To see no harm in kneeling before Royalty or in kissing the Bible and yet to refuse to kiss the crucifix or kneel before a sacred image is an inconsistency due in great part to the imagination.

The Litany of Our Blessed Lady, with its varied list of titles, offers a serious obstacle to many non-Catholics. They cannot find in themselves to call the Virgin "Cause of Our Joy," "Ark of the Covenant," "Gate of Heaven," etc. Yet by their acceptance of the Council of Ephesus they have already given her the incomparably higher title of "Sancta Dei Genetrix," Mother of God, *θεοτόκος*.

Those again who hold baptismal regeneration, yet deny the Sacrament of Penance, lay themselves open to the charge of giving way to their imagination. That one man should be freed from sin by

kneeling at the feet of another and hearing his acquittal seems the height of credulity to believe. Yet they have virtually conceded the possibility of such a power by allowing that the minister of baptism cleanses the soul by pouring water upon the brow. Indeed, the great objection to penance being its accompanying humiliation, they would seem to have conceded a still greater abasement by holding the justifying power of baptism. To many minds it may well be more humbling to submit publicly to a physical cleansing than to listen to a judicial acquittal in private.

The doctrine of Purgatory is untenable to those who are led by the imagination. The analogy of Nature, if realized to the full, would not merely prepare us for it, but would, perhaps, lead us to expect it. What evidence we find in the world goes a great way towards proving that our present state is one of trial and preparation and discipline. If such a state be reasonable before death, why not after death, especially since it is evident that the cleansing process can hardly be said to have reached completion in many cases at the hour of death?

One of the most common triumphs of the imagination is the disdain felt for miracles. That a simple Franciscan friar should be taken up in ecstasy many miles above the earth is passed over as a legend, or at best, a hyperbole—so strongly is the theory of gravitation imbedded in the imagination. Yet that bodies should fall is just as inconceivable on *a priori* grounds as that they should mount; nor is any one astonished on seeing his arms or limbs raised at the bidding of his soul. Are we not giving way to our imagination when we deny to spirit the power of raising the whole body? That it should be raised three inches or three miles is merely a question of less or more, which should be neglected in our reasoning, however much it may repel the imagination. Again, to believe that the dead have been brought back to life is considered by some as the highest pitch of human credulity. Yet, as a matter of fact, Nature daily brings thousands to life. Why should not some higher Power be able to bring them “back to life?”

The doctrine of transubstantiation is rejected by many who have little difficulty in admitting the transubstantiation of water into wine at Cana of Galilee. To others it seems inconceivable that accidents should exist without their proper substance; even whilst they admit that the human nature of Jesus Christ existed without its personality; if, indeed, they hold the Divinity of Jesus Christ with all its consequences. Our Blessed Lord's lengthy discussion with the Jews, preserved for us by St. John in the sixth chapter of his Gospel, would almost seem to be summed up in this: “You will be

300
 A-51
 1 NATURE

called on to accept the greater, *i. e.*, My Divinity; do not reject the less."

It may be asked how is this abuse of the imagination to be accounted for? Perhaps the most influential reason is the confusion in our use of the term. It is easy to mistake reason for imagination, and imagination for reason. The word is loosely used for the power of inventiveness. A drama or poem of skilful plot and striking combinations is called a work of vivid imagination; whereas it might be more accurate to speak of our great dramas and poems as works of reason, enriching its productions with the more graceful trophies of the imagination. This inaccuracy of thought has become so widespread that one of the most constant obstacles to the teaching of scholastic philosophy is the powerlessness of certain minds to distinguish practically between an intellectual idea, judgment or argument and a phantasm of the imagination.

Hence to those who are in great part, if not altogether, bereft of imaginativeness, it is common to mistake their reasonings for fancies, and hence to fail in giving arguments their due. In the case of moral arguments and evidences of Christianity and the like, where "probability is the very guide of life," the mistake of confounding imagination with reason produces harmful results. Such minds will feel uneasy with the doctrine of the Trinity—to take one example from many. Baffled in their endeavor to realize it, they turn from all the delicate arguments in its favor as from an attempt to submerge reason.

The confusion between thoughts and fancies leads other men to trust their imagination in place of reason. They believe whatever can be outlined or pictured or drawn up in groups of statistics. Of Dean Stanley, Huxley once said: "Stanley could believe in anything of which he had seen the supposed site, but he was skeptical where he had not seen. At a breakfast at Monckton Milnes' just at the time of the Colenso row, Milnes asked my views on the Pentateuch, and I gave them. Stanley differed from me. The account of the creation in Genesis he dismissed as unhistorical; but the call of Abraham and the historical narrative of the Pentateuch he accepted. This was because he had seen Palestine—but he wasn't present at the creation."¹

Birth, education, environment help on this tyranny of the imagination. A conviction once begotten by its activity, day by day, as the despotic image grows more familiar and clearer it asserts its power by stifling our reason and blunting the force of argument. Some men cannot handle or bear the sight of firearms without an

¹ *The Nineteenth Century*, August, 1896. "T. H. Huxley," by W. Ward.

irresistible dread. When every precaution has been employed and every means has been taken to show them that the weapon is unloaded and harmless, they will still reply: "I know it is unloaded. But it is safer to lay it aside. It might go off."

Only a sharp effort of the will can shake off this tyranny of the imagination in the things of faith, where intrinsic evidence is not strong enough to compel assent. At times the great act of submission to the authority of the Church puts an end, once and for all, to the fetters which an uncurbed fancy has forged round the soul. The majestic Bride of Christ fills the imagination with an object that suffers no lesser fancies to dispute its sway. Sometimes the process of drawing off from the servitude of the imagination is gradual. The tyranny has rooted itself too firmly and its effects are too widespread to be torn up by a sudden effort. The exercise of will power, which is the prime moving cause, and the meritorious principle of the act of faith has a daily duty of compelling the imagination to picture the reverse of much that it formerly held true. In the end, when the prejudices and fancies that swayed the mind are as good as supplanted by sober pictures of the truth, the peace of soul which results is a reward above measure for the closeness of the struggle. To have been forced for years to fight a daily battle against the presumptions of a lower faculty makes us wary in trusting to vivid imaginings. Constant exercise of our reason and our higher will has established our soul on a basis of truth, and we have only to be faithful in few things in order to merit the reward of being set over many and of seeing what we have so long felt to be true.

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INDUSTRIAL ARBITRATION.

THE losses entailed alike on the workingmen and on their employers by the industrial conflict which they call *a strike* have been so appalling that both capital and labor have come to the conclusion that, in the settlement of their contests, it is better to appeal to reason and good will than to resort to brute force. The wisdom of this course will be made evident by counting the expenses of one of the contests, the great Chicago strike of 1894. In this deplorable struggle the Pullman Company and the twenty-four roads centering in Chicago suffered a loss of earnings amounting to \$5,358,224; the actual loss to the workingmen in