

THE IMPOSSIBILITIES OF UNBELIEF.

*The Nineteenth Century.* London : 1881.

*The Grammar of Assent.* John Henry Newman, D.D. London.

*Brownson's Review.* New York.

*Contemporary Review.* London : 1881.

THE world of intellect has its fashion, like the world of society, and it seems that tawdry rhetoric about religion and its disappearance, and the appearance of Atheism in its place, forms, in a very marked manner, the "*enfant gâté*" of modern literature. Hardly a single number of one of the better reviews and magazines issued in the English language does appear without containing a paper bearing either directly or indirectly on this much-vexed subject. And, strange to observe, though proceeding not unfrequently from quarters holding entirely opposite views, an analogous strain runs mostly through all. If it is a lamentation over the encroachments of unbelief upon the territory of faith, launched forth by some clerical pessimist, the hopeless view of the future which is held up therein before the reader appears to find its verification in the confident assertions which another article, written, perhaps, at the headquarters of exact science, sets forth to the effect that the old moorings are being gradually but surely swept away, and replaced by the positive truths of science. Other writers, who pretend to the office of impartial critics, discuss with much ability the decay of religion in general, and make believe, or try at least to make believe, that the proud boastings of Atheism have not been uttered in vain. From the concurrent testimony presented to the intelligent reading public for inspection, it would seem, therefore, as if the era did not lie in a far-off future when religion will belong to the facts of the past, and only as such offer a matter of not uninteresting research to the human mind.

This, it may be claimed, is the aspect of the situation which is forced, more or less, upon any one who is in the habit of forming his opinions upon the mass of evidence on the subject which is encountered in the vast majority of publications. And this aspect, moreover, seems to be borne out by facts. For it must be admitted that the falling-off in numbers of those who openly profess one creed or another is not merely considerable, but so enormous as to indicate, with a goodly amount of probability in its favor, that the days of the reign of the orthodox faith of mediæval times are drawing to a close. And this opinion, let it be remarked, is not

the opinion of a few isolated individuals, but is an opinion which has been and still is gaining ground among a large class of society. It is held to be true to such an extent that even reflective minds, on turning their vision towards the social condition of the "to-morrow," draw deep sighs of suspense and anxious fear, and surrender almost to despair when contemplating what the issues of the growth of unbelief will be.

All this is true enough as far as it goes. Nor do we attempt to gainsay this sad state of affairs. But what we contend is this, that the reason for this sad state of affairs is not to be sought in the fact that belief has become impossible—which, we regret to say, is, however, generally presumed to be the case—but in the phenomenon that the proud sons of the nineteenth century content themselves, in a large measure, with superficial aspects. Lassitude of thought, mental inertia, a slovenly habit of accepting the thoughts and conclusions of others as true without much questioning, a disinclination to inquire into the soundness of the foundations of new theories—in short, the work of reason half done, and left in that unfinished stage—this, and nothing else, we hold is a just cause for uneasiness. It is very certain that doing things by halves has never yet accomplished any good. And especially in a region so all-important as religion, the light and off-hand, not to say frivolous manner of dealing with a grave object is bound to produce sad results. It is deeply to be deplored that our age has fallen a prey to this habit, and it is all the more to be deplored because the very leaders in the realm of thought appear to have lost the true bearings of thought, and have nowhere thrown the lead until it struck bottom. Therefore, until men learn again the great lesson of life, namely, to think correctly, a general veering round to the true pole can hardly be expected. But, all this notwithstanding, unbelief in these our days, we assert, has not become less impossible than it has ever been before in the history of the human race. Nay, it seems to us safe to state, that unbelief has become more impossible than it has ever been before. And the reasons for this position are quite obvious. Life and the complex facts of life surround us in precisely the same way in which these problems hovered round our ancestors in ages past. The light of reason, by means of which all generations endeavored to solve those ponderous enigmas, has remained the same. If it has undergone a change at all, it has undergone a change in favor of the attitude we assume. For in all departments of human knowledge a really wonderful advance stands on record. What but a short half century ago were virgin forests to the human mind, realms on which no bold adventurer had as yet laid his eyes, that, to us, are well-known pleasure-grounds, in which we move with comparative ease and familiarity. The means of verifying

the judgments rendered by our intellect have not been decreased by the march of time, but have, on the contrary, been multiplied and amplified. Faith, therefore, as largely dependent upon the verdict of human reason, must needs stand on firmer ground to-day than it did before. If religion and reason were not inseparable allies, bound to stand and to fall together, *then*, and *only then*, would it be true that faith is on the death-list, and that the span of time still to be allotted to that hallowed relic of old covers, at best, a few short solstia. And until reason and its proper and legitimate use are totally and irrevocably forfeited by mankind, faith will, therefore, remain until then the one reliable companion, the one true friend of man through life.

The possibilities of unbelief, that is to say, the positive, the aggressive side of Atheism, is being put endlessly before the public; not so the negative side, which, in our estimate, is much the stronger, and outweighs in force all that ever can be said against it. What is unbelief, and why is unbelief impossible? These, then, are the questions we propose to deal with in this paper. They are portentous subjects, and can, of course, not be discussed in an exhaustive way within the limits of an essay; nor is it the object of this paper to do so. We aim merely at directing the chaos of contending opinions towards the investigation of a field whose cultivation, we believe, cannot fail to compensate richly for the labor bestowed upon it.

The structure of modern Atheism has frightened the world by presenting the appearance of an unassailable fortress. Outworks, quite formidable in number, are seen all around it; they are seemingly faultless in construction; they are laid out with unquestioned skill. This strong fortress, moreover, we know has fallen into the hands of the clever genius "*man*," and knowing this, we are apt to consider it impregnable, and stop without going further. We, generally speaking, do not inquire into what really determines the value of a stronghold, namely, the amount of armament and provisions, which alone render even a most heroic garrison capable of rendering any amount of resistance. Now a loose way of reconnoitring does not disclose the discrepancy between appearance and reality. But if we borrow for the occasion a little French *élan*, and a little of British dogged perseverance, and climb the breastworks and inspect minutely the stores, we will perceive that the provisions are scanty in the extreme, and that the magazines are filled solely with blank cartridges—cartridges, it is true, which, on exploding, will make a great deal of thunder and smoke, but perfectly harmless as far as their destructive value is concerned. We learn, hence, that the clever genius "*man*" has been gifted with a great deal of ingenuity not in vain. Sham detonations and sham

manœuvres are protecting the weakness of the stronghold, and they have to stave off any real assault. In reality, the place is absolutely untenable and hopelessly defenceless. Thus the terror-inspiring attitude of unbelief dissolves itself into an idle phantom. Atheism, we repeat, has had but one success, and that success is, it made people believe that it would replace religion, because it did not divulge the secret that a kind Providence had confiscated every real weapon, and that, boldly confronted by reason and common sense, it cannot hold the ground. In other words, unbelief hid its poverty under the garb of wealth, and the counterfeit coins it passes from hand to hand have acquired a current value because the assayers failed to stamp upon them the mark of counterfeits.

Now, what is unbelief? What constitutes its essence? Unbelief, if it means anything at all, means necessarily the absolute negation of God as a personal, self-conscious, absolute, and infinite Being. Men of superior intellects promulgate to the world that there is no personal God such as Christianity tries to impose upon human credulity. The question is now, what is the proper office of reason before assenting to the proposition offered by science? The office is less onerous than many perhaps are inclined to think. All that is required is to take the trouble, not to wade ankle or knee-deep, or, say up to the shoulders, into the waters of the atheistic creeds, for that only confuses the mind, but to go a little further and submerge ourselves, and dive down with a will until the ground is reached; and then, if that is done, we need but fearlessly open our eyes. The result of the venture yields up one or two "unknowables," or an "indefinite and undefinable first cause,"—in short, the agnostic formula "something is," under variations. The discovery amounts practically to this. The very men who deny the existence of a personal Deity, who deny the existence of a Supreme self-conscious Being as the cause of life and of all that is, these very men, in the last instance, are bound to proclaim an emphatic denial of the truth of their own assertion. This being the case, reason and common sense do not hesitate very long to apply the terse and drastic Bible saying to the men of science, "Only the fool says in his heart, there is no God." Modern unbelief, looked squarely in the face, does not proclaim the non-existence of the Supreme Being, heretofore called God, but proclaims in reality simply, that it has no name for this last link of the chain, that it can give no information as regards its character, nature, physiognomy, etc., and hence, modern unbelief virtually affirms what it pretends to deny. True, until the unknowable quantity is reached, the mind has to wander through a vast multitude of negations; of these a great many are quite correct, while nearly all of them contain a germ of truth, and the whole fabric does not collapse until it is

seen that the whole basis rests on treacherous quicksand. Modern enlightenment leads thought back into darkness, heaps cloud on cloud, and when all is shrouded in impenetrable mists, then it turns round and bids those who followed, with perhaps a feeble and untrained light of reason, whithersoever they were led, in a most obliging manner, "Grope your own way." And there exactly the mischief lies. Having led others so far, the leaders there retire from the leadership. Not that they themselves disbelieve what they enunciate to others. Far from it. They cling to it with a tenacity which is all the greater because on reaching the final conclusion a conviction in their inner selves contracts, as it were, their very breath, and invites them to abandon a result which, no matter how much their heads may bow in assent, their hearts neither can nor do accept. They announce to the world, with honest simplicity, what science, when asked to tell us about the Master of all science, always will tell us, namely, that He is above all science, and *master* but never *matter* of science. They tell us that they do not see God, that they do not feel God, that they cannot hear, or smell, or taste God, and because of this unsatisfactory testimony of man's sensiferous organs, they proclaim what their whole life denies. The theoretical negation by the lips has no practical hold upon them. Their every activity in life embodies the paramount weight they attach to those relations which depend solely upon and, in fact, presuppose the existence of a personal Deity. And not a few affirm, in a most exemplary manner, the practical belief in God, since without it their lives would be the climax of inconsistency. It is well to remember, that the doings of a man—that is to say, thought operating on the will and manifesting itself in action—that these doings furnish the true criterion by which a man's belief must be judged, and from which the innermost, though, may be, suppressed convictions of the heart must be inferred. If this unerring gauge is applied to the professors of unbelief, it is soon apparent that, however much they appear to swerve from the true basis in theory, practical belief permeates their lives in spite of all. Consequently, to the man of real thought, schools of unbelief have no existence; he turns them into corroborative evidences, and for him they are powerful confirmations of God's existence.

Further than this, a correct mode of thinking extracts even more from sounding the true depths of the various schools of modern advanced thought. We learn how utterly hollow the notion is that either Agnosticism, or evolution, or infinite differentiation, or the unknowable, or the Universum, as Strauss calls it, or the infinite, as some metaphysicians say, or the all, or the good furnish any basis on which religion can be placed. As Frederic Harrison well puts it, we learn, "that we need something that we

conceive able to reach our human sympathies, to be of nature akin to our own, something that we can really commune with in a moral union, something living, not dead." And all systems evolved by modern thought fail to furnish this one central point.

Again, the one quantity beyond the grasp of science, beyond the demonstration of our senses, appears invariably as immaterial, superhuman, supra-telluric, that is in the language of common sense as divine. These inferences, it must be observed, are necessary logical inferences drawn from science's sanctuary; they appeal directly to reason as self-evident, and hence on them belief rests on a firm basis.

Unbelief rests, however, also on a secondary basis. This is the difficulty of reconciling God such as we must conceive Him, if we conceive Him at all, namely, God as Allwise and as Allgood, with the misery and wretchedness of human life, and with the whole mass of evil which surrounds man on all sides in this world. It is hard, to say the least, to believe in a being which is the plenitude of perfection and goodness, and to believe that selfsame being the author of that interminable chain of cruel suffering, of which our own times, like the past ages, are so full. It seems impossible to reconcile the foremost and noblest prerogatives of divinity with the agonizing tortures which have befallen and still continue to befall human individuals. Here facts clamor for solution, facts whose reality nobody can gainsay, facts from which every one suffers more or less. Here there are perplexing contradictions, greater perhaps than the problem of life itself. Here, in the moral and sociological sphere, there are ins and outs which seem to lead inevitably to the rejection of the idea of God with much greater force than the abstruse investigations of science. Here life and its daily cares and sorrows, its troubles and anxieties, and petty annoyances and afflictions, great and small, and disease and crime, and illness, and vice, and passion and its wild outbursts—all has to be dealt with, all ask for a place and ask for an explanation. And, on the other hand, love and virtue, and charity and humility, and forbearance and heroism, even unto the sacrifice of life, and obedience and friendship, and affection, and a host of other relations petition likewise for solution. Here, there is enough, indeed, to bewilder any intellect which mistrusts the power of the light of reason to carve its way through this amazing mass, and to disentangle the thread of harmony which runs through all. And yet this thread of harmony not only runs through all, but leads on to belief in God, and moreover to belief in His revelations and His church. Reason and common-sense, as has been said already, reject with scorn the negation of a personal God; they reject with

greater emphasis the conclusions to which a superficial glance at the secondary basis of unbelief appears to lead.

To philosophical minds wont to wander in the realms of speculation, Dr. Brownson's "refutation of atheism" offers a network of irrefragable logic, acute analysis, logical deductions, "in forma," reanalysis, so admirably conclusive, that there is no door of escape left from the force of deep and sound reasoning which America's great philosophical mind develops therein step by step. For another class of minds, Dr. Newman's "Grammar of Assent" treats the subject "why we ought to believe" in an exposition so clear and so strong, that this work for many may serve as a guide from darkness to light. But proofs of this character are only accessible to a select few, because they are comprehensible, intelligible only to a select few. The large mass of human society is perfectly content with a catena of facts much more loosely chained together, and follows as a rule the dictates of "common sense," which term denotes, as we take it, reasoning of such character as to adapt itself readily to the majority of intellects. And hence, the question before us now is this: Can and does popular reason suggest or offer a solution which contains a strong probability of its intrinsic soundness, one that does bear a convincing momentum with itself, one that commends itself to the acceptance of the average mind? And to this question we venture to answer, without hesitation, "yes."

The first step towards reducing the chaotic mass to a state of order is to clear up the position, in other words, to ascertain exactly the premises on which the line of reasoning has to move along. Popular reason, as has been stated already, derides the negation of a personal Deity; it not only accepts, but it believes in God, as a superhuman, self-conscious being. Our own conscience tells us, next, that right and wrong, good and evil are realities, which cannot be explained away. Whatever efforts science may make to convince mankind that the inner voice, which can be stifled for a time, but never can be entirely suppressed or plucked out altogether, is merely the offshoot of education and civilization, in short, nothing but a product of evolution, it will never be accepted at large. Every one bears, thus, within himself an internal evidence of the existence of evil. To this must be added the external evidence, which is not lacking. The world is, as a matter of fact, so full of it, that it requires much greater hardihood to deny the existence of evil than possibly can be attributed to common sense. Therefore the premises which popular reason presses into our service are: God, man, and evil.

Now, even the limited spark of human intelligence shrinks from coupling with the conception of God the idea that He is the cruel,

wantonly cruel, and moreover, perpetual tormentor of the human race. It is repugnant to reason to suppose so, it is a thought which cannot be entertained because of its utter intrinsic absurdity. If we think God, we have to think Him as a Creator, who creates of necessity good and perfect what He does create. He can no more create for suffering, than He can create evil, and yet suffering as well as evil do unquestionably exist. In pre-Christian days this dilemma defied human sagacity, yet Plato went so far as to utter in a prophetic spirit, that until the word (*λόγος*) became man, this mystery would remain a mystery. And this is the utmost limit to which reason could go in those days of gloomy darkness. But now that Christianity has chased away the mists of old, the position is changed. Reason has no longer to perform guesswork altogether; it has merely to single out among the solutions offered the one which is in full accord with it, which harmonizes those facts which, without the adopted solution, would not merely contradict but totally exclude each other. And, on examination, the tenets of Catholicity will be found to offer a complete and full, and also a thoroughly acceptable and satisfactory solution, first, in the doctrine of a hereafter, that is, the immortality of the soul; secondly, in the doctrine of the fall of man, that is, of having forfeited in some way or other the primordial state of perfection. That these two assumptions fill the bill completely, does not require much sagacity to perceive. For the moment we look upon this life as upon a transient state, a stepping-stone to real life; the moment we look upon the telluric existence as simply a forerunner of a state which does not approach us with each sunrise so much nearer to dissolution, but which is neither subject to change, nor subject to time or to space—then, it follows clearly, that not this short term of planetary life but the hereafter becomes the reality upon which reason must base its verdict as to whether God is just and good or not. No sane-minded person ever enters a concert hall and forms a judgment about the exquisite melodious harmonies of a sonata of Mozart or Beethoven, by listening simply to the jarring sounds which strike the ear while the orchestra is engaged in tuning the various instruments. And what else is this life but a brief time allowance in which each individual is given an opportunity to catch the keynote struck by the leader, and tune every chord accordingly? What else is this life? If we desire to join in the harmony of neverdying sounds, we must set the instruments in proper order now, or we shall be excluded from participating in the grand concert of eternity, should we fail to have possessed ourselves of the right note, for the strains bursting forth there suffer no imperfection. This, then, is the rational aspect of life. And as partakers of real life in a world beyond our globe, as heirs to an im-



material and imperishable existence, much of the significance we are in the habit of attaching to things below disappears. The dignity of our nature is raised, we crawl no longer along the glebe of the soil. From fortuitous accumulations of chemical atoms, from that degrading lot which science desires to assign to us, we soar into a nobler and higher sphere, in which neither intellect nor heart loses its sacred rights. The least, therefore, we are compelled to do is to suspend our judgments until we know the full meaning of the hereafter. This by itself clarifies our minds and frees them from the bias of narrowness.

As regards the second assumption, to which reason cannot refuse its assent, it will be seen that the fall of man accounts to us for evil, as well as for the wailing cry of distress which mankind is sending up from age to age. It makes it clear to us why our craving for happiness meets with such ungenerous returns here on earth, and teaches us to look upon human nature with sympathy and regret rather than with pride and haughtiness. These two points once fully admitted, all further doctrines of genuine Christianity unfold themselves without any difficulty of comprehension. Reason confirms them all and weakens none. On a little reflection it is quite apparent that the twofold natures being welded into one in every individual, any disorder which disturbs the one must necessarily react upon the other. And hence, it is not well possible to presume that, no matter what the cause of man's fall may have been, no traces of the same should be discoverable in his present condition. It is perfectly legitimate, on the contrary, to suppose that whatever cause led to the forfeiture of the primordial state, should have left visible imprints, so to speak, in the temporal and in the spiritual order. And to examine whether this is the case or not, appears therefore a rational undertaking. Now looking at the world and its present condition, the foundation of peace and the principle of universal harmony consist in the principle of authority. In all constellations of life its necessity is encountered, in the small nucleus of the family, in communities, in cities, in states, everywhere alike. In fact, it confronts us with such overwhelming force that the concession is very readily made, "human society without authority ceases to be possible." Now why is this so? Why does the social order proclaim with but one voice its dependence upon the principle of authority? Why has it to rely upon it as an indispensable condition of existence? The answer is very plain and is full of instruction. In every human breast there dwells a tendency to make the "ego" the centre of rotation, that is to say, to set up the "self" as the authority par excellence. The liberty of choosing between right and wrong, added to the propensity of obeying rather our own inclinations than restraints

imposed upon us from without, this creates the necessity of checking in a wholesome way for the preservation of society at large these dangerous human proclivities. Nobody, we think, can gain-say the strong leaning of our nature to disobey rather than to obey, and it is this leaning which has to be overcome. Obedience must be enforced, when disobedience is offered. This is the object of all laws, which practically only limit and regulate obedience and provide penalties for violations of their injunctions. A refusal to obey a government's authority is, we all know, called revolution. Thus we have here in the temporal order established a disorder of vast import. And we ask, whence does this disorder come from? Can it have for its progenitor a similar disorder in the spiritual order? To deny this possibility is unreasonable, and therefore we extend the investigation. If we calmly deliberate what the greatest disorder is which we can conceive between creature and Creator, we are bound to admit that it is the desire of the creature to equal the Creator, to take his place. For any other transgression except this does not attack the Deity in its most vital part. A declaration of self-sufficiency appears, therefore, as the greatest offence man can commit, and it remains now to be seen whether we can fasten upon man the fatal ambition to be God himself.

When we consider the weakness of man, the darkness of his reason, the fickleness of his will, and all the sufferings with which he is assailed on all sides, it appears at first strange, that in such a creature no less an ambition than to rival God himself should lie at the bottom of all his misery. But if an analysis of disobedience is made, pride looms up as its germ, and pride, so Christianity tells us, has been the cause of man's fall. For, what *but* pride gives the impetus of wishing to replace God by man, and this impetus of putting the cultus of human intelligence above the cultus of the omnipotent Deity is only too apparent in these our own days. These reflections put therefore the case in the following light. What we find very forcibly expressed in the state of society and of life around us, namely, the necessity of restraining man's inclinations to set himself up as supreme authority, a demand made upon us by society with inexorable severity, a demand which keeps us from using our free-will in any direction fatal to the welfare of the race, in short, the principle of authority and its imperative necessity, this self-same disorder followed up in and applied to the spiritual order is traceable there. And hence the conclusion that the disturbed equilibrium in the temporal order is the remnant and sequence of the disorder in the realm of spirituals, forces itself upon our minds. Nor is this all. The nature and essence of pride explain to us "error," they explain to us "sin." We recognize in "error" the thought of a fallible mind which refuses to acknowl-

edge any higher authority than himself above himself, and we perceive in "sin" the act of a corrupted will, which disregards any authority but the own volition.

Common sense goes even further. For in accepting God, his indwelling authority is not denied. If He is the only Creator, then He must be also the only monarch, so to speak. Consequently all authority on earth must be a participation in and delegated by the divine authority in order to be legitimate. Man in his own name has no power over man; when he commands in his own name, his power is brute force. It is a usurpation of a power which does not belong to him. Every authority on earth must be under a certain aspect an offspring of the divine to lose the odium of illegitimacy. The social order is, however, permeated by a divine rule of authority, and in obeying a father, a mother, the child for instance obeys simply the appointed representative. And so the claim of a government, whatever its form, whether republic, or kingdom, or empire, upon the obedience of the nation, is sacred on this ground only. How drastically do not the several "isms" of our day illustrate the correctness of this view! Abolition of religion means abolition of authority, means, hence, rejection of the powers in authority, and that, in turn, means dissolution of society. On this point the world has fully agreed, and that verdict indorses in full what reason, working quietly and untrammelled, with open eyes, its own way, tells us, namely, that the necessity of authority in the temporal order serves as an evidence, and virtually is but the consequence of a disorder in the spiritual sphere owing to the reaction of the latter on the former by reason of their close interdependence.

The road now ascends less steep, and all that is required for a full understanding is a careful following up of what is implied in the accepted admissions. The fact, for instance, that every human being possesses free will now, leads necessarily to the belief that free will was likewise a possession of man before the fall, from whence it follows that an act of man's own free will did inspire him to assert his own self-sufficiency, to aim at equality with God. Again, the idea we have to form of divine justice makes it incumbent to believe that no transgression can remain unpunished, as it further compels us to recognize that the atonement dare not be less than the offence, and since the latter, being directed against the Infinite, acquires thereby this character, an infinite merit alone can expiate the crime. It being evident that the primordial state of perfection became forfeited as soon as the fall was accomplished, man in his fallen state has been of course unable to offer an act of equal intrinsic value to those which he could perform in his state of perfection, that is, it becomes clear that, though able to offer an

infinite insult, he thereby incapacitated himself from offering an infinite satisfaction in order to re-establish the original relations. Thus the necessity that proper reparation should and had to proceed from one man and yet more than man at the same time, is established. A rational conception of God makes us willingly concede that Omniscience had to foresee the fatal calamity which overtook the human race on its journey, and that hence a provision for a full appeasing of divine justice is a necessary exigency of the case. For, if not made, then the lot of mankind would be endless suffering, which is an idea altogether incompatible, as already stated, with our conception of God. The very attributes, without which God becomes unthinkable, necessitate therefore the belief that proper provisions for the redemption of the human race were made from all eternity. Now while these reasons urge upon us very powerfully the necessity of a Redeemer, the fact that, as a man caused the race to fall, so a man also must cause it to rise up again, brings us face to face with the mystery of incarnation in the God man. He alone could rescue the human family from perdition, since He alone could offer a sacrifice of sufficient magnitude.

From what has been said, it is evident that the rejection of the Incarnation resolves itself into a repetition of the first fall, and as such confirms only the same. For to acknowledge God as Creator with all prerogatives of Deity, to acknowledge ourselves as creatures, to acknowledge evil and our imperfections, and to deny what follows from these premises, amounts to this. Human beings admit that they are finite and created intelligences, and somehow not in the original state in which they were created; they admit that all that leaves the Creator's hands must be perfect; they admit that they are impotent to free themselves by their own might from the imperfections to which they are heirs; they admit even that God could not be God, had He not devised an atonement for the race; they admit all this—but they dispute nevertheless the sovereign right of the infinite Intelligence to have provided by the Incarnation for the redemption of mankind. Now if this is not an emphatic and flat refusal to accept God's authority, if this is not prescribing limits with a perverted will and a darkened reason to the mercy of God, and a finding fault with Him that He condescended to take the form of man, and as Godman atoned by a sacrifice of infinite obedience for an offence of infinite disobedience; if this is not setting up human wisdom, teaching divine wisdom, and in the last link of the chain, another effort of man to pull God's majesty down from the throne and mount it himself—then, we must give up reasoning altogether. Men, certainly do in these days rebel, and that quite openly against the acceptance of the divine sacrifice on Calvary, and this revolt, it appears to us at least,

confirms in a conspicuous and singular way the doctrine of Christianity regarding original sin, in offering evidence beyond question to the effect that the inheritance of our forefathers has been faithfully transmitted even to our generations. No more convincing proof could be put before us than this very effort to shake off the tenets of Christianity in order to show us that the doctrine of original sin, etc., is no idle invention of priestcraft.

If it is once clearly understood that pride is the root of all evil, that it is the one fault which attacks the very sovereignty of God, then Christianity in its necessity, in its unity, and in its infallibility offers no obstacles to a full comprehension. The questions, not unfrequently asked, what need is there for a Saviour, what need is there for a church, appear then in their true absurdity. For, mindful that our faculties have been impaired by the fall, and there is but *one* will which has the essential and the absolute right of being obeyed, the will of the One, who created all and who preserves all, we see at once how it is quite indispensable that the ordinances of this one will should have been made known to us, and that there should be ministers to remind us of these ordinances, and to maintain their observances in family, church, and state. The thirst for knowledge, which once proved so fatal, proves no less so even now, if not kept in proper bounds. Knowledge, if not under the protective tutelage of grace, nourishes the old arch-enemy pride, and inspires a secret preference of our own will to the Higher will. It is very apt to make us forget that even the most extended knowledge is but ignorance before God, and that humility alone raises us up. What is it, after all, that human reason does understand at best? Nothing, literally nothing; faith, on the contrary, embraces even the infinite. He who believes stands therefore above him who only reasons, and simplicity of heart becomes preferable to knowledge. True perfection consists in proper interior dispositions. It is also quite natural that the One who speaks to us through His Church, has not wished to satisfy our vain curiosity, but rather to enlighten us as to our duties, to exercise our faith, and to purify and nourish our souls by the love of what is truly good and true and beautiful. Nor is it less so, that in endeavoring to penetrate with reason the impenetrable mysteries of God, human thoughts wander astray and find only error at the very moment when they think they are drawing from the Almighty his secrets. On the hand of faith, science can reach out into wondrous depths; without it, it is a ship, waterlogged, and without compass and needle. Religion, on the other hand, explains fully to us our misery, and points out at the same time the remedy for it. For while teaching us that we can do nothing of ourselves, it also teaches us that we can do all things through Him, who is all

strength. It makes us feel our own weakness, nay, almost enjoy our nothingness; it bids us to throw aside vain aspirations and the littleness of our opinions, and thus digging out, as it were, a deep pit in our hearts, it infuses into them through humility that peace which proceeds from implicit trust.

The tendency to deride this belief in the supernatural is apparently widening in this world. The brilliant utterance of our times that man, at last, was obtaining a complete victory over nature, led to a belief and to a trust in materialism, which caused people to be regarded as enthusiasts who asserted that the invisible was more certain and more palpable than matter. The belief in a something that is above and beyond us, which has the promise in it of satisfying the infinite longing within us, has been stunned for a time, but it has not been extirpated. Nor can it ever be. As Max Müller says in very simple language, "The faculty of recognizing the infinite, which neither reason nor science has been able to overcome, has always been able to overcome reason and science." The influence of religion of faith on the character and spirit of man remains unchanged. Only through the supernatural can that chivalry be engendered which knows no personal danger; only through it can man rise to the desire to become worthy to associate with the Deity itself. And the farther we reach out in true knowledge the lesser need we part with our reason.

The *Creed of Layman*, a paper by Frederick Harrison, published in the *Nineteenth Century*, will in the following quotations illustrate that the soundness of the position we have taken in this article begins to be clearly perceived. He describes the situation as follows: "The capacity for religious unity is checked in the present day by the prevailing theories. What has happened is that knowledge and belief do not range with devotion. Practice is out of joint with profession, and reverence itself bears the standard of revolt." He holds with us that religion must reduce life as a whole to harmony by a central principle of life and by a systematic discipline of life; he notices distinctly that all non-theological schools repudiate this idea, start back from worship, from any formal appeal to feeling, from the very idea of devotion of spirit to a great power—in a word, turn with disgust and mockery from religion. He says: "Mention to them *worship, devotion, religion*, the discipline of heart and practice in the continuous service of the object of devotion, and they smile in a superior and satisfied way." He adds, later on: "All the teaching of history, the entire logic of philosophy, the perennial yearnings of the human heart, the intense hopes of the best men and the best women are against them." In another place he says: "It is the delirium of revolt which screams out to us to cast out the habit and faculty of faith. Besides, it is cant; mere delu-

sion to suppose it is done, or can be done. Neither enthusiasm, nor discipline, nor faith, nor reverence, nor devotion to a cause, nor love for a power greater than ourselves, are at all dying out in the world. They are not growing weaker. They are, even in the midst of change, growing wider, deeper, more universal." Wherein he errs is this, that he supposes positivism in the abstract idea of humanity furnishes subject and object of faith. And we offer in the following quotations his own words as evidence that apart from the doctrines held by the Catholic Church nothing can or will fill the void. It will be also seen how clearly and how fully he perceives the true requirements of genuine religion :

"Man has a mind and an enormous accumulation of knowledge. We have to satisfy that mind and give order to that knowledge. Man has energies; we must give them a full scope and yet keep them in due bounds. Man has a soul fitted for great devotion; we must fill that soul with a worthy object of devotion, strengthen it, purify it by constant exercise. If we leave out one of these sides, human nature is cramped, harmony is destroyed. And what is more, not only must all three sides be appealed to alike, but they must be appealed to by some great principle that can inspire them in one work. If this can be done it is plain how enormous must be its power over life. If there be such a principle, all else in human nature is of little moment till we have it. If harmony in the whole nature be possible, it must be the supreme good dreamed of by the philosophers of old. It must be happiness, duty, wisdom, peace, and life all in one. And why are we to assume so confidently that there is no such harmony, that human nature shall drag on in the oscillations of external conflict, in misunderstanding and crossed purpose forever, till this planet chills into its last phase of silent ice?"

He remarks: "The rude men who sweat and swelter in mines, in furnaces and factories, the hedger and the ditcher, and the cottager with his pinched home, the women who stitch and serve, the children wandering forlorn and unkempt into rough life, how are these to be sustained and comforted by science and enlightenment? How will free-thought teach discipline to the young and self-restraint to the wild? What sustenance will the imaginative and devotional nature receive from the principle of free inquiry?" The dilemma presents itself to this able writer in full force. On the one hand he sees "free inquiry, interminable free inquiry, skepticism, indifferentism, research, and then more research, waiting for something to turn up, while vice, ignorance, strife, moral helplessness and mental indecision do not wait, but grow and enlarge;" and on the other hand he sees the necessity "of the devotion of brain and heart and energy to the service of that mighty Power

which stands beside us day and night, of which every act and thought of ours is but the reflection, the aggregate force of the lives of true men in the past, present, and future, in which civilization is incarnate and lives a continuous and visible life?" He holds with us that "it is a farce to pretend to love or to serve the infinite, the unknowable or evolution or the idea of good." He declares therefore that an abstract idea without a reality corresponding to it never can be the object of worship and devotion, and hence of religion and faith. *Humanity* consequently, which is the ideal he conceives as the revivifying element of the creed of the future, is debarred from filling that office, but not so the God-man, whom the true form of Christianity holds up for adoration. Even there his candor does not stop, for he admits freely that the creed of humanity which he is advocating, is incapable of offering an equivalent to the superhuman joys and hopes and seraphic raptures which Catholicity has produced and still does produce. He does not believe that his creed can work these miracles of subduing sense and galvanizing certain chords of emotion. He recognizes, on the contrary, in the eternal recompense of earthly pain, the everlasting communing of congenial souls, the heavenly contemplation of infinite goodness, a force which belongs exclusively to Christianity. Yet, after writing the following words, "How often has the overburdened spirit felt peace amid agony and bereavement; how often has the dying lips smiled in peace; what trust and calm have beamed in the eyes of the weakest, the most afflicted, the most forsaken! We know it all. We too have felt all these things. We are not cynics, swinishly deaf to the spiritual voices." After writing these words, he bursts out again in doubts and says, "But the question again is, are they real, are they true, or are they artificial!" To us the inconsistency of affirming as a fact, a reality, for such experience is, first, and denying in the same breath this fact, this reality, this experience, seems incomprehensible. But without commenting upon the contradictions contained in that able paper, the author goes therein as far as human reason can take us; he sees the absolute necessity of a personal God, sees that this personal God must be God and man in one person, whose life we may imitate, whose footsteps follow with reverence, a power human, and hence ours to commune with and embrace, and divine also, to infuse strength and grace for the onward struggle, stir up the sluggishness of our nature, enliven all that is noble within us, and make us feel that He is the real and living and loving power. Christ as believed in and taught by Catholicity is confounded by him with the Christ of Protestantism, those mock forms of Christianity which can no longer preserve the semblance of being true before the world. Superficial



acquaintance with the tenets of Catholicity leads him to mix up its essence with the glittering but worthless quartz of that loose Christianity which has been the most fruitful source for opening up avenues on which unbelief could make its ingress. Aware that "thought and feeling are not enough," but that we need "practice—action;" aware that the elements of genuine religion are not only *belief*, that is, an intellectual scheme, and *worship*, that is, an appeal to the highest feeling, but also *discipline*, that is, a scheme of life, the place which education occupies in life is thoroughly understood by him, and likewise that an organized body of competent and trained teachers is an indispensable requisite. In fact, the Church and its hierarchy, and all that Catholicity implies, he sees clearly by the light of reason, as *that* without which true religion can not live, and what impedes his sight is the absence of that light which reason is powerless to supply, namely, "grace," the gift of humility and prayer. The essential ingredients of true religion we find in another paper of his well given in these words: "To have true religion resting on the belief in God, we must have a deep sense of the reality of His being, an inward consciousness that we can understand His will, and that we can rest in peace and love on his breast." How impossible, even according to his own words, that that abstract idea of humanity can serve as a central focus for these requirements. The clearness of vision of this highly gifted writer, a clearness which at times is almost trans-luminous, is beset by difficulties, which do not beset common sense.

For, that this world is not man's All, that the world beyond forms the true home of the human race, is satisfactorily proven to popular reason by the craving for a happiness which all the world offers is impotent to satisfy. The reaching out for what lies beyond has ever been characteristic of man at all times. And on that evidence the supernatural is accepted. And if but this is done, then the complete synthesis of life, and of every relation of life which Catholicity offers, explaining to us what science and mundane wisdom ever will fail to explain, comes forward and asserts its true place. Catholicity never stepped from the position which has been assigned to it by its intrinsic character, but the insinuations of modern enlightenment effected this, that outsiders looked upon it as a structure with no firmer foundations than those whose collapse they witnessed every day.

The sum of contemporary knowledge of good or evil is, it must be borne in mind, in a large measure the handiwork of those who write. And over the far larger field of literature the health or disease of the writer's mind and momentary humor are spread; they form, at bottom, the leading feature of the work, and are, in reality,

the only thing an author communicates to us. The subject is often but a trifling part of many pieces of literature, and the view of the writer a fact of far more importance, because less disputable. An author who has begged the question, or reposes in some narrow faith, cannot, if he would, express the whole or even many sides of experience; for his whole life being maim, some of them are not admitted in his theory, or if admitted, are only dimly and unwillingly recognized in his experience. The writings from which we have quoted serve as an illustration. Yet, though it is a maxim of the morality of letters that it is best to be wholly silent on a subject-matter unless it is wholly understood, it appears to us, papers like those we have referred to, are welcome contributions and valuable as a study in the lessons they teach. Unable to speak from own experience on what Catholicity offers, he advises strongly not to disturb the faith of those who can believe, and hints in more than one passage that genuine faith is probably sought in vain outside of the Church of Rome. Such words are guides rather than obstructions, and every argument in favor of that hollow phantom Humanity contains life-giving strength as an argument to bow before the God-Man of genuine Christianity. The vantage-ground of unbelief is narrowed down by the position Frederick Harrison takes; for if nothing else is learnt from him than this, that those who believe stand above those who, accepting solely scientifically demonstrated theories, waver through the length of their terrestrial career in unhappy doubt, an essential step forward is already made.

In all temporal affairs we are mostly willing and ready to listen to counsel and advice, and yet temporal affairs, after all, are within our mastery. Why then should it be irrational to pursue a like course in affairs which are acknowledged not within our reach altogether? If it is difficult to be our own infallible guides in the matters of this world, if we lend our ears to friend and foe, weigh both sides, and frame our actions in accordance with the decision we arrived at, it is surely not less difficult to steer clear of rocks in the realm of spiritual affairs. And it is a common-sense view at all hazards to consider it highly proper not to reject those means, through which alone we can acquire full control over ourselves, channels instituted by the Creator himself, because of His knowledge that without them we would be drifting to and fro in a helpless condition. But these channels have one *sine qua non* attached to them in order to become available, and that proviso even appears only just and proper, namely, the grace of faith must be earned by an act of our own, by a decision of our own free will. *That* which broke the link of intimate relationship in the beginning, *that* also must co-operate in its re-establishment. The rights with

which we have been created are too highly respected by the Creator to force upon us any gift of His against our will. Yet God speaks to man's heart; and what we have to do is to listen. For there is a voice which in the depths of our souls accosts us; there is a desire which bids us to follow the promptings of the heart; there is a longing in the human breast to call Him, with all the soul's ardor, near unto us. If in humility we pray for that voice, that desire, that ardor, then faith, the divine gift of grace, is not withheld, but pours in and diffuses its blessing.

Reason, therefore, and common sense can and may do much; they can show us the necessity of and the road even towards faith, but there their office ends. And it ends there, because the seat of faith is pre-eminently the heart of man. The intellect verifies and indorses, but another power vivifies the feelings of the heart. This line of thought, it seems to us, ought to be taken up in our days in preference to stale discussions about the progress of unbelief. Faith neither can nor will die out. Its acquisition, however, is not furthered, we take it, by endlessly repeating how impossible it is to believe, whereas a determined throwing off of all prejudices, and following up of what reason and common sense demonstrate so clearly, namely, that it is impossible *not* to believe, may at least have the effect to shake the bias of unbelievers, and bring them gradually once more into the possession of a treasure, which of all goods is the only real good, since it is the one that we carry with us beyond time into eternity itself, where the reward of faithfulness awaits Belief.

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