

THE PROTEST OF COMMON SENSE AGAINST SOME
COMMON NONSENSE.

IT is undoubtedly a fact that a great many Catholic laymen, to whom there have never been afforded opportunities of receiving systematic and comprehensive instruction on the subjects of Catholic faith and its ancillary philosophy, are disposed to seriously mistrust the ability of common sense to vindicate itself in the matter of religion and sustain its dignity before the eyes of the skeptic, the unbeliever and the scoffer. The insinuations of the first, the denials of the second, or the ridicule of the third may cause not the shadow of an alteration in the personal attitude of such a Catholic towards the teachings of Holy Church, but he stands abashed, silent and embarrassed before his antagonist, impotent to voice the blessed convictions which possess his soul, and so retires in confusion from the contest, pursued by the cheap derision of the seeming victor, who unduly felicitates himself on the superior readiness of his tongue.

Some Catholics of this sort are even inclined to regard as rash and presumptuous the conduct of those of their brethren in faith who are not so ready to yield to the clamor of opposition in matters of religion, opining that the deliverances of a layman on such subjects are, to say the least, hazardous and superfluous, when there are so many men who have pledged their lives to God's service, for the spread of the saving truth and the frustration and extermination of ubiquitous error. But the priest cannot always be at hand to confute, with his learning, the errors and heresies with which the Catholic layman is daily confronted, and the stand for truth must largely be maintained by men of mere common sense, with no actual and technical acquaintance with Catholic theology and philosophy. It is indeed rash in the inadequately instructed layman to venture a defence of certain points of detailed Catholic doctrine, ability to discuss which implies the possession of information acquired only by long and laborious study; but the anti-religious thought of the day is not attacking such doctrines, for the good reason that its assaults are directed against the very fundamental beliefs upon which those doctrines rest. And these fundamental, primary beliefs are within the mental possession of the plain, common-sense man, and can readily be developed into explicit consciousness when one questions his inner self, not in that spirit of arrogance which flings the gratuitous lie into the very face of mild-speaking truth, and, like "jest-

ing Pilate," will not wait for answer, but in that spirit of confidence in the ultimate pronouncements of consciousness which becomes the sane man who has not committed himself to some of the nondescript absurdities which parade the intellectual world of to-day, labeled philosophy, and denying the fact of being itself.

It may probably be retorted that such primary beliefs, beyond all others, require for their defence against antagonism the trained philosophic mind, and that when common sense is challenged regarding them, something distinctively transcending common sense is needed to stand and give adequate answer to the challenge. In purely philosophical matters, Reid endeavored to state the whole case of common sense, and only succeeded in making himself quite as unintelligible and unconvincing to ordinary minds as the theories he combated, and St. Augustine seems to argue against common sense when, writing of the fundamental notion of Time itself, he exclaims: "Quod ergo est tempus? Si nemo ex me quærat, scio: si quærenti explicare velim, nescio." What, then, is time? If no one asks of me, I know; if I wish to explain to one who asks, I know not. (*Confessions*, xi., 14.)

But the great African saint and philosopher did not mean that interrogation as to Time reduced him to ignorance of its significance. The import of his declaration is simply to the effect that he could conceive, but not comprehend, the idea of Time, and he did not hesitate to intimate that the idea was one which, being in itself fundamental, could only be obfuscated by attempts at definition. But surely St. Augustine would not have felt the slightest embarrassment in confessing his inability to completely define the idea of Time to one who ventured to deny that he, or any one, could have such an idea. He would probably have answered that Time is time, and would have stoutly maintained before his antagonist that, to say the least, his own assertion was just as weighty as the other's denial. The rich substratum of our intellectual life defies analysis, but it imparts meaning and order to all the minor coruscations of thought. The reasons of its existence cannot be confined within the limits of definition, but nevertheless announce themselves in the inner sanctuaries of thought with indisputable credentials of sovereignty. Ultimate principles compose the real wealth of intellectual life, and when we are asked to express them in demonstrable terms, we may well avail ourselves of the philosophy of the enamored Juliet, and retort that "They are but beggars that can count their worth."

Surely, if the profound and saintly Augustine, with mind illumined both by singular graces and by vast learning, did not hesitate to declare the incompetence of human thought to grasp within an act of complete and detailed comprehension the basic

edge. "When you confront us with hypotheses," says Frederic Harrison, "however sublime and however affecting, if they cannot be stated in terms of ordinary knowledge; if they are disparate to that world of sequence and sensation which to us is the base of all our real knowledge, then we shake our heads and turn aside." What a mad independence is this! It is the independence of destitution—the independence of one who would lay waste his inner life and call it peace! They declare that the imagination stands paralyzed before such conceptions as are implied in the belief in God and immortality, and that consequently they must "shake their heads and turn aside." But let these men only divest themselves of the wretched egotism of their souls, and give heed to the suppressed admonitions of their inner nature, and there will come a struggle, and, as Hallock says, "When the time for a struggle comes, the imagination that affirms may be more than a match for the imagination that denies." ("Forum," vol. ii., p 586.)

The fundamental convictions of religion form one of the most universal and oft-repeated experiences of the human kind. In the light, then, of that dominant agnostic philosophy of the day, which insists on the testing of all things by the indubitable facts of recorded experience, what possible argument can there be against these convictions? And this experience is not one which may be challenged as being possible only under certain and limited conditions, for the force which gives rise to it is persistent. Adverse argument, superficially understood facts of Nature, and the aberrations of intellectual pride and despair, may render an individual mind unresponsive and repellant to this force, but there is ever a general tendency to fall back to the old lines of thought. When there is a successful effort made to readjust the mind, with all its acquired load of facts, observations and conclusions, back to the old condition—and this condition is unquestionably a lowly one of humility and spiritual prostration—there follows an immediate correspondence with the persistent force of objective religion which sends the proud philosopher to his knees, and brings from his lips an humble and unconditional credo. The fact that certain men have never undergone any such experience no more militates against the truth evidenced by such experience in other men than does the fact that one born blind has never beheld the sun call into question the existence of that luminary. Such men have no "spiritual optics," and they read the universal scroll of things with a dull, undiscerning eye, which can obtain no insight into its real and divine significance; just as Peter Bell could see a primrose in a primrose, and nothing more. The reasons why such men wish so earnestly to disengage their minds from all control, or even suggestions, of the supernatural, are quite obvious, and

the truth has been told them very frequently and undisguisedly of late; by few with more bluntness than by Prof. Mivart, in a quite remarkable and characteristic article, entitled "Professing Themselves to be Wise, They Have Become Fools," published in the *AMERICAN CATHOLIC QUARTERLY REVIEW*, Vol. XVI.

There may be no hypocrisy in some of the teachers of agnosticism and atheism; they may sincerely believe what they indoctrinate, but their beliefs are unquestionably the results of their inclinations and wishes, rather than of their unbiased intellectual research. They wish there were no God, no hereafter, and suppressing relentlessly every admonition of their inner nature that there is a God, is an hereafter, they exert all their ingenuity of mind towards the bolstering up of their predilections, and at last attain an actual belief in the shallow fallacies which they teach.

The tyro in skepticism, agnosticism and kindred isms is an insupportably tiresome individual, who has nibbled at Spencer and has committed to memory some of the materialistic aphorisms of "philosophers" such as Tyndall and Huxley, Buckner, Vogt and Haeckel, and their imitators. This is the individual the Catholic of common sense meets almost daily, and common sense is quite competent to expose the vapidness of his arguments every time he opens his mouth to enunciate some choice dictum gleaned from his favorite authorities. Such a one tells the Catholic in a defiant, don't-you-wonder-at-my-daring manner that he does not believe in God or immortality because the existence of the one or the certainty of the other cannot be demonstrated. It is generally a young man or a young woman who makes this bold, bad declaration—one who has yet to learn that it is absurdly foolish to affect a cheap and untenable singularity; and that the questions he or she so triumphantly puts have been completely answered a thousand times.

The man of common sense, when confronted by positive or hypothetical denials of the existence of God or of immortality, has always at hand a ready answer which cannot be too much insisted upon. "If there were no God, no immortality," he may say to the skeptic or to the unbeliever, "you or I could have no such ideas." And the simple reply of the common sense man cannot be answered, whether in his crude way of thinking he consider the ideas of God and immortality within him as of un-mixed supernatural origin, innately implanted by God in the act of creation, or whether he have a vague intuition of the unquestionable significance of that power of the human mind which reads between the lines, as it were, of the presentments of sensible experience, discerning the ulterior and theological import of phenomena, and abstracting therefrom ideas which the commonest

common sense and the most profound candid philosophy must recognize, and does recognize, as indubitably beyond the scope of material causes.

"But listen," remonstrates the skeptic, "to the explanation of the origin and genesis of religious notions as given by Spencer"; and then he proceeds to read long passages from the First Part of the "First Principles," or from the seventh chapter of the "Data of Ethics"—passage pregnant with exemplifications of the cardinal and subversive error of materialistic evolutionary philosophy; the error of superior, overshadowing effects produced by inferior, inefficient causes. Homogeneous nebulosity, into which a force inducing instability is arbitrarily introduced, without any explanation whatever as to its origin, is made to produce heterogeneous coherence; effects are made to multiply themselves, evolving into conditions of segregation, equilibration, etc.; inorganic matter is made to produce organism, and organism, life; sentient life produces mind, etc., and so on along the whole category until the backward course sets in, and dissolution proceeds to impel everything back to a condition of chaotic collapse. And thus, in a most inconsiderate fashion, the agnostic proceeds to satisfy all the *a priori* requirements of his philosophy, wresting the aspect of every fact of nature and of history in order that it may square with his bias of thought, and then he calls upon the world to admire his work as the very perfection of inductive, synthetic reasoning. This is, indeed, a strange philosophy—one that would have made an old-fashioned scholastic philosopher, with mind permeated by convictions regarding efficient causes, stand amazed and aghast.

And, by the way, with what reason does a philosopher who believes that all things must evolve and dissolve in ceaseless alternation, and who must therefore consistently maintain that dissolution is just as important a process in the endless flux of things as evolution is; with what consistency, may it be asked, does such a philosopher propound any ethical doctrines at all, since according to his philosophy moral chaos and dissolution is just as important and necessary a condition of affairs as moral order? It may, of course, be readily replied to this objection, that evolution is the present process, and that consequently rules of conduct promoting progressive and ascensive moral evolution are now the proper thing; but it may in turn be asked of the evolutionist how he determines within himself that evolution is now in order, and that the time for dissolution has not yet arrived? The evolutionist impatiently replies that the question is an absurd one, and appeals to the fact that man holds in contemplation unattained ideals, and that he further is irresistibly conscious of the obligation incum-

bent upon him to strive as he can to attain the realization of such ideals. "As life has advanced," writes Spencer, "the whole accompanying sentiency has become increasingly ideal." ("Data of Ethics, par. 12.) But what a whole begging of the question is this! It is the same old weary story of puny causes accomplishing relatively great effects. What under the sun could have influenced the first forming of ideals in the primitive intelligence, fresh in its evolutionary ascent from the bonds of matter? What adequate causes could induce any intelligence, with its origin in a purely material basis, to look upwards and forwards, when the whole history and philosophy of its being would tend to influence it to look backwards and downwards? There is but one adequate reply to this simple objection, and it involves an almost ludicrous aspect of the evolutionary hypothesis, and consequently it is not one that the evolutionist cares much about availing himself of. It is this: that the universal scheme of things started (if the expression be allowed by the evolutionist) in a developed condition, and that dissolution was the first order of change; therefore, dissolution having reached its consummation, evolution then sets in, implying the gradual and progressive recovery of pre-existing conditions. If the evolutionist wishes to take refuge in such an absurd notion, he is quite welcome to it. In the meantime, the man of common sense denies and rejects *in toto* such explanations of evolutionary psychology as advanced by Spencer, for the simple reason that he opens his argument with throwing into sentient organism an intrinsically engendered element which sentiency cannot yield—the element of mentality busying itself with ideals.

Not only is it a necessary truth, recognized by all who have not committed themselves to an irrational denial of the existence of necessary truths—that an effect cannot transcend its cause—but it is a corollary truth that a cause must be superior to its effect, for the very obvious reason, that to produce an effect equal to itself a cause must inevitably exhaust itself and become annihilated in the act of production. Hence the mind abhors the notion of a cause producing an effect equal to itself, but also declares that the cause must survive the effect; and in this survival is manifested the superiority of the cause over the effect. These indisputable facts suggest a ready, common-sense notion of the Infinite. Given the sum total of finite things, the necessary existence of their cause before their creation, and also the survival of such cause after the act of creation, and its implied superiority to the product, and you have the Infinite. It is not necessary to suggest any further elucidation of this indirect demonstration of the existence of the Infinite, but enough it is for the present to show that we have thus placed before the mind an object of consistent, logical

thought THAT IS NOT FINITE. And what is that which is not finite?

"Meanwhile," writes Spencer, "with exasperating disregard of all philosophical consistency, "there has been developing the ghost theory." ("Data of Ethics," par. 44.) Has there, indeed? May we be permitted to inquire of the "apostle of understanding" from what efficient and precontaining cause the ghost theory asserted itself in the evolved savage? Why, in the name of all that is reasonable, should the savage, or even the highly evolved and civilized man, with mind produced and evolved solely from material causes, entertain any thoughts concerning what is non-material? The ghost theory of the savage can only arise from the inherent religiosity of his mind, and the fact that he fixes upon the spirit of his departed chief or relative as the objective point towards which to direct his religious sentiments, simply argues deficient intellectuality, and further argues against the agnostic and pantheist, that it is the natural and spontaneous impulse of man to direct his religious thoughts and aspirations towards a definite and semi-comprehensive end, rather than towards the vague and unknowable.

That men have always thought of and aspired for God and immortality, is an argument in support of the real, objective validity of those ideas which common sense unhesitatingly relies on, and which nothing but the commonest nonsense can seriously impugn. It is just as natural for a man to be religious in the innermost recesses of his being, as it is for him to breathe; and if his baser nature held out to him the same solicitations to thwart his vital function of respiration, as it does to stifle the nobler aspirations of his soul, he would doubtless make the attempt. It might be said that such an insinuation contradicts the assertion just made, that it is natural for man to be religious, implying that it is more natural for man to seek the avenues of degeneration than it is for him to "lift his eyes to the mountains whence cometh life." But if any one choose to dispute which is the dominant nature in man, he is really not worth arguing with, and his position is either resultant from some insuperable bias of thought or from some puerile itch for affected and combative opinions.

From an evolutionary point of view, the irreligious or unreligious man is a startling example of degeneration and atavism. "Each function," says Spencer, "has some relation, direct or indirect, to the needs of life; the fact of its existence as a result of evolution being in itself a proof that it has been entailed, immediately or remotely, by the adjustment of inner action to outer action; consequently non-fulfilment of it in normal proportions is non-fulfilment of complete life." ("Data of Ethics," p. 30.)

What a cogent arraignment is this of Spencer's own philosophy! There can be no more acute incompleteness of life than is there in the life of that man in which there is systematically suppressed that overmastering function of the soul which may be designated as the function of worship, and which demands for its complete and adequate discharge that it be directed in well-defined channels towards some objective end, in whose coherence it may rest satisfied, and not towards a so-called end, before whose abysmal vagueness it could assume no attitude save that of mere wonder and paralysis of aspiration. Spencer argues, with truth, that the popular conceptions of supernatural power have been undergoing a gradual process of abstraction, but he insists on the "lame and impotent conclusion" that there can be no end to this process, and that it must inevitably culminate in the complete dissipation of all objective, definitive elements from religious ideas. "A life comes into a man," ironically says R. H. Hutton, of such doctrines, "the depths of which he cannot sound, and his very conviction that he has not the capacity to comprehend its fulness is to empty it of all significance!" (Essay, "What is Revelation?") Without adverting at length to Spencer's utter disregard of the well-established proofs that all existing religions among savage nations present unmistakable practices of exalted origin, and suggest, in their most degraded practices, traces of pure, theistic faith, rather than a progressive evolution from ever lower aspects of thought,¹ it may pertinently be called to mind that what he says of religious conceptions may be also said of the conceptions of human personality, as current in different ages and among different people. The popular conception of personality has undergone a process of abstraction, but does this fact justify one in absurdly concluding that such conception must finally be emptied of all coherence and significance, and that men must live out their lives without really knowing whether they had lived or not? The idea of personality is truly a most abstract one, and it is a vulgar mistake to hold that it is so completely comprehended that it may not be analogically attributed to the Supreme Being; and yet, notwithstanding its high degree of abstractness, this idea of personality, as applied to human beings, asserts its real, objective validity most unmistakably. In the same manner the idea of a personal God is one that no degree of abstractedness can cover over with the impenetrable veil of the Unknowable.

¹ "Like an old precious metal, the ancient religion, after the rust of ages has been removed, will come out in all its purity and brightness; the image which it discloses will be the image of the Father; the Father of all the nations upon the earth; and the superscription, when we can read it again, will be—not only in Judea but in all the languages of the world—the Word of God."—Max Muller, *Science of Religion*, chapter i.

And this is the sort of religion—the religion of the Unknowable—which many supposed was to supplant all other religions! When the gospel of this religion is preached, and the sublimities of its indefinable, delusive and elusive *summum bonum* are expatiated upon as indicating the true goal of human endeavor and aspiration, one is reminded of how the mischievous Launcelot, in the Merchant of Venice, “tried confusions” with his “true begotten father,” who, being “more than sand-blind, high gravel-blind,” knew not his graceless son.

GOBBO—Master Young Gentlemen, I pray you, which is the way to Master Jew's?

LAUNCELOT—Turn up your right hand at the next turning, but at the next turning of all, on your left; marry, at the very next turning, turn of no hand, but turn down indirectly to the Jew's house.

GOBBO—By God's sonties, 'twill be a hard way to hit.

And so the poor bewildered individual who asks the apostle of the Unknowable what he should do to lead the perfect life, what path he should take, will receive an answer like Launcelot's reply to his father's query, and well may he exclaim, with the nonplused old man, that “'t will be a hard way to find.” The religion of the Unknowable is truly one which directs man to turn to the right and to the left, with a final indirect turning into nothing at all; but the man of common sense is not “sand-blind and high-gravel blind,” and from such ambiguous doctrines he turns aside in disgust. He demands that the paramount concern of his life shall not be expressed in terms of absolute unreasonableness, and nowhere will he find the dignity of his rational nature so much respected with so ample a concomitant satisfaction vouchsafed to all the religious tendencies of his nature, as within the fold of the Church, which is truly—

“The very opener and intelligencer
Between the grace and sanctities of Heav'n
And our dull workings.”

The dabbler in modern philosophic literature has heard or read of a foolish doctrine called materialistic monism, teaching the production of all the diversified conditions of the universe from a simple material principle, and he is much disposed to consider this doctrine a very fine thing. He reproaches the man who maintains old-fashioned Christian convictions concerning creation, and tells him that he is adhering to a vulgar and exploded dualistic conception of the universal scheme of things. The cool, inconsiderate ease with which these advocates of purely materialistic evolution evolve everything from primitive diffuse matter, remind one of a story told concerning a certain old professor who

occupied the chair of philology in a university located in a town called Middletown. This old gentleman was a very profound and learned man, but his insatiable penchant for digging at verbal roots made him at times exceedingly wearisome to his pupils. He was, in truth, one of that class satirized by Cowper :

“. . . learned philologists who chase
A panting syllable through time and space,
Start it at home, and hunt it in the dark
To Gaul, to Greece, and into Noah's ark."¹—(“ Retirement.”)

The old gentleman had been unusually expatiative one morning before his class, and had been holding forth on etymological intricacies with an earnestness and laboriousness which would have done credit to a Grimm or a Max Müller, when one of his pupils interrupted him, and, with an affectation of absorbing interest in the subject matter of the professor's lucubrations, arose and said :

“ Doctor, has it ever occurred to you to trace the derivation of the name of our town ?”

“ Why, no,” replied the professor. “ Have you given the matter any study ?”

“ Yes, sir, I have,” rejoined the young man, “ and I am firmly convinced that Middletown is derived from Moses.”

“ Why, bless my soul,” exclaimed the astonished professor, “ in what manner have you arrived at such a conclusion ?”

“ Easily enough,” imperturbably answered the young man, “ by simply dropping ‘ oses ’ and adding ‘ iddletown. ’”

And the process of reasoning by which the evolutionary monist satisfies his mind and endeavors to convince the world that everything is evolved from matter is just as grotesque as the etymological process by which the young student derived Middletown from Moses.

If these gentlemen who descant so largely on the dignity of their idea of the materialistic unity would exercise a fair modicum of common sense, they would speedily awake to the fact that their much vaunted doctrine is completely and irretrievably punctured by one of the primary laws of physics. It is the inevitable tendency of any physical body to consummate its activity and realize its potencies spontaneously, and this tendency can only be checked by the resistance of a superior power. Hence, if the original conglomeration of nebulous matter, viewed as a whole before any processes of segregation and individuation had set in,

¹ Cowper's absurd contempt for certain branches of knowledge and learned research, concerning which he was in total ignorance, exemplifies in a striking manner a truth as expressed by J. S. Mill : “ We know how easily the uselessness of almost every branch of knowledge may be proved to the complete satisfaction of those who do not possess it.” (*On Representative Government*, p. 140.)

could not attain the developed conditions which resided within it potentially, save by slow processes of evolution, occupying countless ages of time, it must either have done so in obedience to the preordained plan of the Divine Creative Will, or it must have been resisted in its tendency to accomplish its development by an extrinsic, and, by necessary implication, an evil power. The first conception rejected, the other horn of the dilemma must be grasped, and hence the much talked of doctrine of materialistic monism, with its boasted unified conception of things, turns out to be a very vulgar dualistic conception after all—the dualism of Zoroaster and the ancient Persians. Nay, it is a dualism not even as respectable as the dualism of Zoroaster, for, according to the renowned Magian, Orumzd must in the end triumph over Ahri-man, but the doctrines of evolution and dissolution, as expounded by Spencer, teach that a series of alternate and senseless triumphs will go on without end; now the principle of construction must prevail, and now the principle of destruction, and so on, *ad infinitum*. This is another doctrine at which the man of common sense “shakes his head and turns aside.”

There is another class of vagarists whom the Catholic of common sense almost daily encounters, and these, far from ventilating any obviously atheistic, agnostic or materialistic doctrines, congratulate themselves as being Christians of a very superior kind, and they usually manifest a large liberality of speech in communicating their complacent convictions. Their chief contention is that they have developed a deep power of insight into the real significance of the teachings of Christ, and they have deduced, as one of the principal and most salient features of their belief, the doctrine that worship by form and creed must be condignly abolished and relegated to the limbo of religious inadequacies. “The substance of Christ’s teaching was his doctrine of enthusiasm, or of a present spirit dictating the right course of action and superseding the necessity of particular rules. (Seeley, “*Ecce Homo*,” Chap. XXI.)

The position of these teachers has been amply discussed and their claims completely refuted (see article on “*Ecce Homo*,” by Cardinal Newman in the “*Catholic World*,” vol. iii.), but it may not be inopportune to say a few words concerning a book universally popular among those favoring a creedless, formless religion—“*Natural Law in the Spiritual World*”—from the pen of that prolific scientifico-religio-sentimentalist, Prof. Henry Drummond, especially the two chapters of that work which are most read by the Simon-pure Christians just adverted to—the chapters on “*Parasitism*” and “*Semi-Parasitism*,” attacking creeds, theology, worship by form, and chiefly church-going.

Professor Drummond is a most nimble theorist, hopping from one hypothesis to the other, as the fancy seizes him—now advocating the biological definition of life advanced by Spencer “as a correspondence with environments”; now adhering to the opposite doctrine as enforced by the Duke of Argyll in his “Unity of Nature,” where life is defined as a resistance to enviroing conditions that would engulf and destroy it; now claiming that the discovery of certain scientific laws has effectually dissipated the mysteries of the supernatural condition, placing man in possession of the profoundest secrets of eschatology, and now insisting on the unfathomable mysteriousness of the simplest laws of nature; now insisting on the strenuous and ceaseless strife required to prevent one’s spiritual nature from degenerating, and now urging that the attainment of salvation is the most easily accomplished task imaginable. Truly, the kaleidoscopic character of the professor’s “religion” is most astonishing and bewildering, and convicts him of being a waverer in religious matters, with about as much coherence and definitiveness of conviction as Bob Sawyer, of Pickwick fame, had with regard to the politics of Eatanswill—neither “buff nor blue,” but a “sort of compound of all kinds of colors.” And this is the sort of teacher who thinks he has a needed message to deliver to the world, calculated to allay the spiritual unrest so prevalent outside the Church! Truly, it has been an affliction of the age, that men with minds seething with all sorts of vague, undigested, and incoherent “views” on religious matters, and touched, moreover, by a most acute form of the *cacoëthes scribendi*, have not felt themselves restrained from disseminating their hazy ambiguous doctrines amongst millions of people so spiritually esurient that they will swallow with eagerness the most diluted concoction offered them. Professor Drummond’s book contains some very well-written chapters, notably his really fine chapter on “Biogenesis,” but his work as a whole, like all of its kind, reminds one of the caption placed by Dr. Johnson over the final chapter of “*Rasselas*”—“The Conclusion, in which Nothing is Concluded.” His religion and philosophy are mere bubbles, blown to generous proportions by a strong breath of conceit, but which speedily burst when contact is had with the requirements of common sense.

What Professor Drummond really knows about Catholicism may be correctly inferred from the following, which he adduces as a striking and shocking exemplification of the “parasitic” religion considered by him as engendered by the forms and practices of Catholic worship. “We can never dismiss from memory,” writes he, “the sadness with which we listened to the confession of a certain foreign professor. ‘I used to be concerned about re-

ligion,' said he, in substance, 'but religion is a great subject. I was very busy; there was little time to settle it for myself. A Protestant, my attention was called to the Roman Catholic religion. It suited my case, and instead of dabbling in religion for myself, I put myself in its hands. *Once a year,*' he concluded, '*I go to Mass.*'"

And a man so ignorant or so prejudiced as to accept and repeat, in sober earnestness, this absurd declaration as the testimony of a Catholic, is actually listened to by some as a pleader against the forms of Catholic worship! To use a strong expression of Macaulay's, made under less provocation than this, such conduct is "enough to make us ashamed of our species." Professor Drummond is a most entertaining writer at times, but he is touched with the prevailing weakness of scientific men of the day—the weakness which induces them to throw aside at times the tools of their profession, and to take up in their stead the delicate instruments of another profession, for which they have had no training, and to blunt them with their clumsy handling. His grand project for the abolition of all churches whatsoever, and the establishment of an independent, spontaneous faith, is as chimerical as the scheme of the Laputian wiseacres as described by Gulliver, which had for its object the complete suppression of all the formality of language. The professor magnificently concedes that there may be a little good in formal worship and in church going, but the whole body of his arguments is against such practices—practices without which religion could not and would not assert itself, and hence he and his teachings are completely, and without hesitation, rejected by sound common sense.

The arguments of men of Prof. Drummond's stamp seem to imply that man is an uncontaminated spirit, capable of serving and adoring his Creator with an unimpeded spontaneousness which needs no forms to excite or sustain it, instead of being, as he is, a weak, erring creature, reduced by his many deprivations and deficiencies to the necessity of exerting all his activities in accordance with such forms and methods as will insure to them the maximum of immunity from frustration by adverse influences, a necessity from which the activities of his spiritual life are by no means exempted. Hutton, in his somewhat remarkable essay on "The Incarnation and Christian Influences," eagerly embraces the doctrine of the Incarnation in an independent fashion, and declares his conviction that the truth of that doctrine places man in such close relationship to his Father that he needs no forms of faith to spur him on in his devotion. It is very true that the assumption of humanity by the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity brought men into closer and more direct relation to God, and

relieved theism of the oppressive idea of the dread, unapproachable solitariness of God which characterized Judaism ; but the fact that the Incarnation brings man closer to his God does not interfere with the other fact that between God and His creature there lies an immensity of unaccomplished obligation on man's part, which, by reason of its vastness, must be worked in systematically. Christ made man's end more clear to him, and indicated the way and method of salvation, but the whole trend of His teaching goes to emphasize the fact that the gulf between God and His creature cannot be spanned without immense effort on the creature's part ; no mere ebullition of "spiritual enthusiasm" will suffice to accomplish the great task. Face to face with his God, as it were, man is paralyzed by the imperativeness and massiveness of his obligations, and nothing but a methodization of his spiritual endeavors will relieve his spiritual aspirations of the stunning vagueness which would otherwise characterize them, eventually nullifying them and producing in their stead their "loathsome opposite."

It is the old, old story of a best way, and it were absurd to suppose that Christ would not have pointed out to man, unequivocally and definitely, the best way in which to shape his spiritual life into coherence ; and of course, the best way as thus indicated by Christ would be the best way for all time to come.

Were it not for forms of faith man could not give expression to the religious aspect of his nature. When one places his mind into direct attitude towards the mere idea of the existence of God, his spiritual faculties are stunned, as it were, by vague and fruitless yearnings, and regulative rules of faith, which lose no value in being recognized as conditional necessities, coessential with the mortal existence of man, must assert themselves. A religious life unregulated by defined manifestations of its existence inevitably loses coherence, and dissipates itself into the thin air of spiritual egoism, and from such into something infinitely worse.

The Catholic of common sense, without any deep insight into theology or philosophy, may reply to the absurd charges of Drummond that, given the fact of God's existence, and the further fact that man's end is God, there is an antecedent certainty not only that there is a best formal way by which to accomplish that end, but also that that best way must be indicated for all time by an infallible source. For God, proposing Himself to man as his end, and revealing to him no aids towards the accomplishment of that end, would be a cruel, mocking God, and would belie His own goodness. Our infinite capacities are such that of ourselves we can do nothing really effectual towards reaching the Infinite, and therefore Christ, the Incarnate God, the bridge between the

Infinite and the finite, established and bequeathed to His faithful a method of salvation. This method, infallible as its founder was and is infallible, being prescribed for man, a social being, necessarily became embodied in an organized institution, the Church. It is impossible for the Church in an entirely impersonal way to be infallible, and as the life of any organization of human activities must always converge to a dominant, distinct and definite personality, so must the infallible power of the Church find its expression and exercise in that personality which may preside over the organization of the Church.

Many a Catholic does not appreciate his blessedness in having within the fold of the Church a centre of rest. He accepts his good fortune quite as a matter of fact, and discharges his obligations as a Catholic with perhaps a touch of perfunctoriness, and with a lack of realization of personal concern. But, of course, such is not the truth with regard to the vast majority of the faithful. If our Church had any inherent tendencies to engender religious parasitism, it would have gone by the board long since. Of course, there are people within its fold who are not capable of appreciating, with Newman, the great dignity and importance of the ego in religious matters; but the mental deficiencies of such people are not the products of the Church's methods, but are preserved by those methods from degenerating into something worse. Prof. Drummond expresses much righteous horror concerning the religion of the Catholic lower classes on continental Europe, a very trite subject of aspersion upon Catholicity which has been completely disposed of by Balmes. But, of course, it cannot be expected of a writer like Prof. Drummond to have any knowledge whatever of Catholic literature, and so he innocently repeats the old threadbare falsehoods which he has heard or read concerning Catholics and Catholicism. The undying and ever splendid, rejuvenescent vigor of the Catholic Church is an unmistakable indication of the personally vigorous faith of the great majority of her members. She encourages an active, independent frame of mind on the part of her children, but rightly insists that the truest independence is obtained when there is recognized the limit and scope of human possibilities. The experiment of withdrawing from her guidance has been tried, with results into which there can be rightly read no interpretation derogatory to the claims of the Church; and the only decent aspects of those portions of the civilized world whose people have lived upon a viciously practical extreme of Buckle's theory are such aspects as have been preserved to them by the irrepressible beneficence of Catholic teaching.

The confusion worse confounded prevalent outside the Church

has been well described by Drummond ("Natural Law," etc., p. 213):

"What is religion? What am I to believe? What seek with all my heart, and soul and mind? This is the imperious question sent up to consciousness from the depths of being in all earnest hours; sent down, alas, with many of us, time after time unanswered. Into all our thought and work and reading the question pursues us. But the theories are rejected one by one; the great books are returned sadly to their shelves; the years pass, and the problem remains unsolved. The confusion of tongues here is terrible. Every day a new authority announces himself. Poets, philosophers and preachers try their hands on us in turn. New prophets arise, and beseech us, for our soul's sakes, to give ear to them—at last in an hour of inspiration, they have discovered the final truth. Yet the doctrine of yesterday is challenged by a fresh philosophy to-day, and the creed of to-day will fall in turn before the criticism of to-morrow. Increase of knowledge increaseth sorrow, and at length, the conflicting truths, like the beams of light in the laboratory experiment, combine in the mind to make total darkness."

Is it to be wondered at that pessimism, with all its degenerating and enervating influences, has seized upon the minds of those who have rejected the bases of truth, and are futilely endeavoring to build up a new temple with the disjointed fragments? Is it surprising that Huxley has defined the exercise of man's most dignified faculty as the "malady of thought?" But the saddest phase of this lamentable state of affairs is that the self-sufficiency which has destroyed so much happiness does not seem to realize the wretchedness of its own condition, but is rather disposed to regard its degradation as elevation, and to consider the seething chaos of its mental world with the calmest self-satisfaction. The propagandists of modern infidelity and doubt have sought to tear from life all the truths that make it worth the living, advancing the most flippant, frivolous and unsubstantial reasons as sufficient necessities for the work of laceration. They have thrown millions of minds into the direst confusion, and have then impudently told them that the possession rather than the loss of the old religious truths has been productive of this confusion. Their exultant invitations to shallow, pessimistic thought, and the almost childish glee with which they propose the supposed possibilities of their irreverent criticisms are infinitely absurd—absurd, however, in a serious way, as being an exhibition of such "fantastic tricks before high heaven as make the angels weep."

But the magnificent structure of Catholic truth remains unshaken, secure for all time on the impregnable rock of Peter, and full of the divine life which shall prevail over the world. The Church will always have griefs to sustain and difficulties to contend with, but

"Nothing is a misery
Unless our weakness apprehend it so.

We cannot be more faithful to ourselves
 In anything that's manly, than to make
 Our fortune as contemptible to us,
 As it makes us to others.

VINCENT D. ROSSMAN.

St. Louis, Mo.

THE MEANING OF SCRIPTURAL NUMBERS.

TO the casual reader of Scripture there doubtless does not appear any special significance in the fact that our Lord said that the good seed brings forth a hundred-fold, or in the fact that He spoke to them a parable about one, two and five talents instead of some other number, or in the fact that He chose just twelve Apostles. Such a reader sees the lesson to be conveyed without giving special heed to the numbers mentioned.

However, it is an undeniable fact that the Fathers, in interpreting Scripture, have written much to explain not merely the meaning of the text itself, but also to show why our Lord used the special numbers, one, two, three, etc., in preference to some other. In other words, the Fathers maintained that there was a symbolic meaning and a moral lesson in the numerical part of the parable or narrative, as well as in the doctrinal portion of the narrative.

In their day, and for centuries before, the intellectual bent was such that not only did words have their meanings, but numbers also were supposed to contain some mystic meaning, some symbolism, which would be clear to the initiated, at least, if not to the less privileged mortal.

So far has this symbolism become obsolete, that to-day, as I said, it does not strike the reader except in a few obvious cases, as, for instance, number three.

Some relics of the symbolism of numbers as a profane science are still to be found in the occult sciences and in various superstitious practices. These, however, are not of Patristic origin, but probably antedate the Scriptural symbolism of the Fathers, and come to us through pagan channels, which had their source in Pythagoras and his school, and perhaps even farther back still, in Egyptian mysticism.

For the better understanding of the symbolic value of numbers