

FROM DOUBT TO FAITH

REV. F. TOURNEBIZE, S.J.

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From Doubt to Faith.

BY

REV. F. TOURNEBIZE, S. J.

Adapted from the French

BY

REV. J. M. LELEU.

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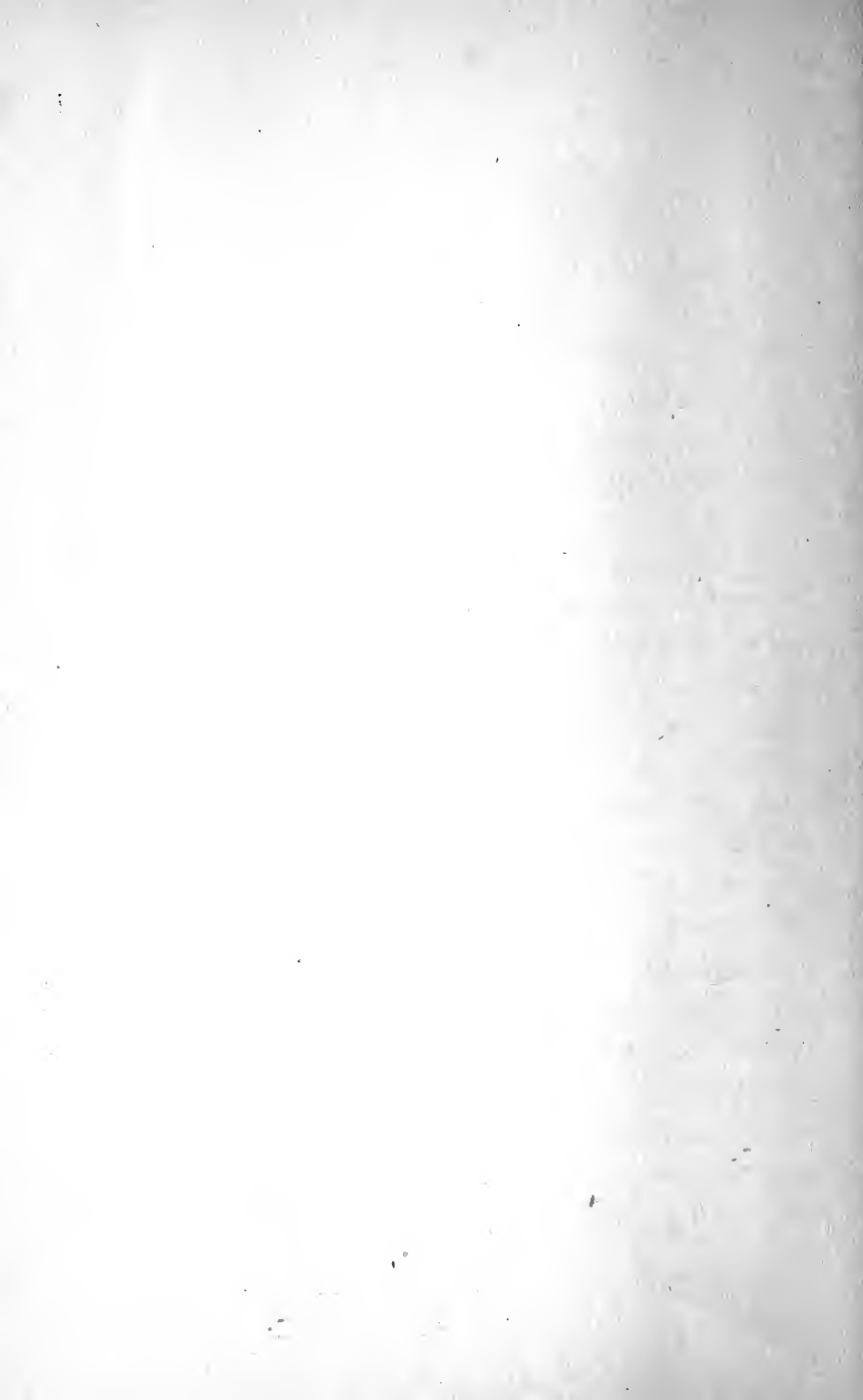
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INTRODUCTION.

This booklet is addressed to disturbed and tempted souls; to minds afflicted with the torments of doubt; to all those, in fine, who coming in contact with Catholic teaching, complain that they have never received the gift of faith, or seem to regret having lost it.

Whilst we deeply sympathize with these latter, we cannot, however, regard them all as indiscriminately blameless. Several of them, at one period of their lives, imprudently welcomed doubt and took complacency in it: afterward, on discovering that the structure of their faith had commenced to totter, instead of seeking the means to repair its breaches, and by God's help, to strengthen it, they lent their help as accomplices, more or less responsible, in sapping its foundations and overthrowing it. But all those who set down their unbelief as the natural result of thought, of temperament, of character, and particularly of training, are not all culpable to the same extent.

If some love to pose as victims of a struggle between heart and mind — a struggle, by the way, in which, as was to be expected, mind is victorious, other unbelievers give proof of sincerity and seem to thirst after religious truth; these, surely, deserve our interest, — that we labor to enlighten them, that we stretch a hand to help them to escape that condition of soul in which they do not find peace.

And so he would not be an apostle worthy of the name who should not endeavor to smooth the road to faith; so sad it is to witness their lives without a supernatural aim and themselves leave the world estranged from God and without consolation.

CHAPTER I.

Our Need of Faith.

I. All our faculties demand faith. — II. Without faith there is no virtue. — III. No happiness.

I. All our faculties demand faith.

To believe is indeed a need of the soul, a need the more imperative, because the soul is the noblest part of our being. According to the expressive statement of Seneca man is not on this earth merely "to filter beverages and to cock foodstuffs." His mind, too great to be absorbed by the instincts of the body, has higher aspirations and the transitory cannot satisfy it. In all his faculties, provided they keep their direction from the starting point and are not perverted or deadened by vices man overleaps time and space and yearns for the infinite. The most wonderful discoveries of science may, for a time, interest the human mind, but they do not satisfy

it. They do not speak to it of its origin, its nature or its purpose. But these questions are of the utmost importance to him, as his happiness depends on them. Left to its own resources, the human intellect catches a glimpse of the great truths which are the substantial food of the soul; but still, what study, what effort, what penetration are necessary in finding out the way traced by religion! The multitude is incapable of such an effort. Even for learned men, when they are not handicapped by illness or the daily struggle for life, how many gaps, how many uncertainties.

They feel they must honor God, but how? The nature of the worship to be given, the duties to which they are bound, who shall explain to them? Philosophers? But when interrogated on these questions, philosophers who live outside of Revelation stammer, hesitate and give contradictory answers. "It is difficult" says Plato "to find the Creator and Father of the Universe; but, to explain Him philosophically to man is absolutely impossible."

The sublime thinker could only see in the truths discovered by human wisdom miserable rafts on which we might provisionally embark; only a revelation made from heaven seemed to him a ship stout enough for the voyage of life.

Without revelation as a guide, human reason distracted and weighed down by temporal cares, would have a feeble knowledge of its essential obligations especially towards God. Do we not see prominent men whom "Christianity does not satisfy" oscillate restlessly between a complete incredulity and childish superstitions? Not being able to honor God, as He deserves to be honored, how could we appease Him after having offended Him? This disturbing thought would ever recur: "Is my sin forgiven?" Crushed by this feeling of the infinite majesty, the impenetrable mystery of which would but add to our terror, we should not hear in the depths of our conscience the consoling answer: "Go in peace, thy sins are forgiven."

Not less obscure for us would be the problem of our destiny, and those large

souls for whom this world is not enough and who sigh for a hereafter should be filled with anxiety. How many men goaded by this uneasiness have come to the feet of Christ! They have said: undoubtedly reason tells us that after disorder there shall be order, that sorrows long and patiently endured, that self-sacrifice and a constant fidelity to the dictates of conscience deserve more than the mere satisfaction of duty performed. But when and how shall virtue be rewarded and injustice punished? To give this question a clear and intelligible answer; to shed a deep peace on the soul, which even amidst the pleasures and sorrows of life, never wholly loses its craving for the infinite it was necessary that its Divine Author should speak to it, come nearer to it to catch its love to lift it up to Himself and to promise to fill the immensity of its desires by giving Himself to it.

II. Without faith no complete virtue.

Since one of the conditions preparatory to faith is to feel that we need and desire

it, we must establish its sovereign importance by pointing out that without faith constant virtue and real happiness are impossible.

Without religion it is very difficult to be virtuous. Of course the native dignity of the soul, the excellence of its education, its character and temperament, the absence of leisure, the withdrawal of occasions may permit the man without faith to escape certain temptations and prevent him from sinking under them; but however privileged he may be, other temptations less gross will reach him. Where will he find the means of resistance? In himself? That would be strange, indeed. There are instances — and there are not a few — where the man of faith, anxious lest he fall, is obliged to use against the tempter all the weapons furnished him by nature and faith based upon the grace of God; he sees himself forced to pray, to beg the help of God, to think of the divine judge and legislator who sees him, warns him of His absolute laws and points out to him as the issue of the struggle either

sublime rewards or dreadful chastisements. How, without these motives of such telling influence, can the man who does not believe expect to be victorious?

The sentiment of honor, perhaps, will take the place of God's grace or supernatural help. We should be very sorry to belittle the sense of honor when honor is genuine; but still we must admit that the honor which governs those who pay no attention to supernatural motives does not usually reach the thoughts, desires or secret deeds.

A feeble judge, the opinion of the world, decides in those questions of honor; it tolerates and often condones many overt acts blameworthy in the eyes of conscience. It does not always brand as a crime those irregular matrimonial ventures, which not only lack the recognition of the state, but — and this is still worse — which are entered into without the sanction of religion. Conjugal infidelity itself frequently incurs no censure. There are so many easy ways to steal or otherwise to go wrong, toward which the capricious jury of

public opinion is very lenient. Before that tribunal only those are disgraced who are so clumsy as to be caught redhanded and sentenced in a court of justice. Again, a duel is usually considered quite sufficient to rehabilitate a compromised honor.

As to the higher and more chivalrous notions of honor, which like an upright judge keep close scrutiny on the whole life, there are very few who retain them in their first delicacy. When once the religious sense is gone, the sense of honor, pale and feeble shadow of conscience, becomes impaired and after a time atrophied. Then what burning passions come and win over the heart! How easily ambition, pride, hatred, avarice, illicit loves urge their wicked suggestions! If a man exposed to their dreadful solicitations can say to himself: here are money, dignities, pleasures, and I can take them and enjoy them and nobody will see me, who will dare assert that a will ever assailed thus will very long resist? Indeed many irreligious men, inconsistent with their opinions do not place very great trust in virtue which has not religion for a basis.

Spread broadcast in society, this idea that earthly happiness is the only one obtainable and that religion is an empty expression, seems to me to be the most dreadful absurdity that can well be imagined. Even so the pursuit of pleasures of the most vulgar sort is so intense that men will, to their own detriment, devote all their energies to secure them wherever they hope to find them. If anarchists and socialists are so terrible, it is because their leaders have perverted and incensed them against established order, that tremendous instinct, by persuading them that there is no happiness hereafter.

And truly, if there be no sovereign legislator, who commands, rewards and punishes, the principles on which our civilization is based are robbed of their sacred foundation. The correlative notions of right and wrong no longer retain anything of the absolute and obligatory; they become as worthless as a broken bow. Why should I be obliged to respect your honor, your riches or your life? Why should I be bound to respect my own life? When

you abolish God, I merely see in what you call duty or virtue, a matter of convenience, of prudence, of good form, nothing more. In the strict sense of the word there is no such thing as duty. There are of course unbecoming deeds, indecent and coarse people,; but there are no longer criminals. Sin has disappeared, for sin presupposes the violation of a fixed law, sanctioned by a supreme legislator. Moreover we shall see that to reject Christ and His Church is by a fatal consequence to reject at the same time Divine Providence.

No matter what may be said, the moral consequences that follow from principles which antagonize faith and the supernatural clearly prove their own falsity. You strive in vain to escape this crushing objection and to reconstruct a morality on new foundations. With Immanuel Kant you eliminate the intervention of God as a principle of moral obligation and make it dependent on human reason, which is to become in this way independent and self-governed: but how can a law, of which I am the author, impose obligations on me? Can I not loose the bond that I have tied?

Perhaps you will suggest the intervention of the State? Yes, but most of my duties are anterior to the formation of the state and must survive its destruction. Besides, those who appeal to the state as a principle of moral obligation, see in the authority of the state only the resultant of individual wills, and consequently move in a vicious circle, whence they can escape only by holding on to supernatural principles.

The list of the substitutes invented to take their places would be a very lengthy one. Self-interest, in its various forms, has been adopted by utilitarians as the only system of morals. In spite of their efforts, honest consciences will never confound the useful, the advantageous with the honest, egotism with virtue, the spirit of self-sacrifice with a mistake in reckoning. Buckner says that the principle of morality consists in subordinating an inclination towards a certain present, though inferior good, to another which is future but superior. Zeigler imagines that he can lead us in the severe paths of virtue

by showing us how our good deeds contribute to the progress of mankind. He hopes to enthuse us with the idea, by spreading before our imaginations the advance sheets of the book of the future century which will record the progress made by our generation. Still another, the last but not the least, counsels us to live in keeping with the prevailing customs of our time. He fails, however, to tell us whether he approves of the Mussulman or the Mormon marrying an indefinite number of wives, or of the Chinaman casting away his newly born babe, or of the savage Indian who faithful to tribal custom kills his parents when they become old and infirm.

Such jests may amuse sceptics dreaming leisurely of a winter's evening by a cheerful fire in a well-appointed room. But deep down in their hearts they know well, that a man fighting for the necessaries of life will pay very little attention to a morality which has no higher authority and which is not ratified by a penal clause. They know that we do not undertake to hedge a fallow deer with spider's webs, nor appease our hunger with air bubbles.

In short, these are the best samples of the means, which the so-called wise ones — the enemies of Revelation — have discovered to take the place of the principles of religious morals. Their systems owing to their ingenious construction at first sight present the appearance of an imposing edifice, but when examined more closely are found to be a house of cards: the slightest breath will topple them.

III. Without Faith no Happiness.

Faith alone can give to the decrees of conscience the force and authority to make them effective. Then again, in time of sorrow, faith is the only solace and protection. A man in his hours of darkness, suffering and anguish appealing to an agnostic philosophy for encouragement and help, finds therein a blind and deaf friend, an icy heart for his pains.

When we pierce the veil with which their pride is covered, the arrogant tranquillity and stoicism which they wear is nothing more than a gloomy resignation. On the 24th of March, 1898, Gabriel

Hanotaux, delivering in the French Academy the eulogy on his predecessor Chalmel Lacour, pictured, in the following words, the attitude of that unbelieving philosopher, before his death: "Graceful and discreet to the end, he became sad at first, then silent, as if he was close to the grave. His soul rebelled, for he was awaiting in sullen silence, the unspeakable morrow of life. It was in keeping with his career; it was the end of the wolf as described by the poet of the fates." To await with the fierce resignation of the brute, the fatal shock which hurls us from time into eternity, is, according to this admirer, the ideal conduct for an unbeliever. Gloomy is his death: not less gloomy his life. The philosophy, which at that supreme moment has nothing better to suggest than the example of the wolf, affords no true comfort in the trials of life.

Please tell me what doctrine underlies this "active and vigorous stoicism," with which the French Academician compliments his hero? What means this "secret

and reserved religion," this "ambrosia which is not for gross mortals"? To these philosophic notions, you may apply the names, pessimism, positivism, materialism, scepticism, transcendental egotism or nihilism, they are empty and disappointing all the same. In all of them duty is made out to be the product of the individual will. Human life is presented, irrespective of the future, as "an unceasing chase" in an arena enclosed by stone barriers where now the pursuers and now the pursued struggle for the bleeding morsels of their less fortunate victim: everywhere struggle, everywhere suffering, and then death without waking "down through the centuries until our planet breaks up into star-dust."

Since the unbeliever expects nothing after this life, we can truly say that he has no happiness. We meet people, it is true, who style themselves unbelievers, and who to all outward appearance, seem happy; but we also see criminals ascend the scaffold apparently in a joyous mood, whilst their souls are given up to stupor and despair. We must not confound true and

heartfelt happiness with outward appearance. This latter is usually only a mask, frequently a lying caricature. Besides, let us not forget that the majority of unbelievers are very shallow: they are trying to pass their lives in a perpetual round of projects and sensations. As to the logical consequences of their doctrines, they never think: like the Epicurean poet they refrain from thinking, what the future may bring them.

However, even to the busiest lives, to the most superficial minds, there comes a time, when these fictitious joys dwindle and disappear, when the mind and heart feel too circumscribed by the limit of this present life. Then, reflections, hitherto suppressed, surge up with irresistible force. In the presence of an unlooked-for affliction, a sudden break-up, an ailment without remedy, those persons sadly compare their ardent desire of knowing and of loving with the paltry and transitory things of this world, beyond which they see nothing. Between that legitimate need — the insatiable desire of the infinite — which

he has, and the narrow, vulgar sphere within which he confines himself there is a contrast, violent enough to crush his soul completely.

He aspires to see the truth in the focus where all its rays converge, and he finds himself enveloped in darkness. He desires an intimate union, by contemplation and love, with a Being eternally the same, always living, who in turn would by His looks, His breathing, His whole influence and being, shed on him the pure treasures of an inexhaustible goodness and tenderness; and to his great surprise instead of that shoreless ocean of pure love, where he tries to satiate himself, his lips find only a few drops which only intensify his thirst. Instead of the perfect and permanent happiness which his nature demands, he finds only a dreary void — the end of all earthly satisfaction. And just in the same measure as he sees his pleasures diminish, the disproportion between his joys and his desires increases and his faith discloses itself the more dreadfully.

He thinks he has been thrown on the

earth like a wave rolled in at random by the ocean and that he like the wave will disappear in a moment, confounded with the dust or scattered to the winds of heaven. He sees himself separated from his family, from his friends and from everything he loves. The more he loves and is loved, the sadder and more violent is the separation. It is the torment of a man who bidding adieu to his loved ones is looking the while at the grave in which he is to be buried alive. Except he stifle all thought and anticipation, his most delicious pleasures, knowing them to be transitory, must arouse in him at the moment of tasting, more violent despairs, more bitter thoughts of regret.

We are not here in presence of fancy's pictures, before spectres conjured up by the overheated imagination of a believer. It is the stern reality, which confronts the man who has no religious belief, when once the tumult of his impressions and the deafening noise of the world have ceased to affect him.

In this regard, we have an avowal by

the German, David Frederick Strauss, the father of modern infidelity, a man whose heart was as cold as his style, a man not usually classed among sentimentalists: "We feel ourselves," he says, "caught in the notched wheel of that monstrous machine of the world. You hear it whizzing, striking, crushing: not one moment of security: with an inexorable movement the wheels catch you, the hammers smash you; and the feeling of absolute abandonment is something unspeakably dreadful." It is as if a convict, who tolling his own death-knell imparts to it a more heart-rending clang. And in this sorry plight, the only solace at hand is the empty thought of the universal evolution, to keep on enjoying the memory of friendships broken by death, to enjoy the beauties of nature and art, to sympathize with others, to fulfil his appointed task and "at last to surrender to necessity and be glad to die."

And so to all human sorrows, the atheist presents only the impassiveness of death: if life be unbearable, at least that burden

ceases when he dies. Believe me, of the many incentives to suicide, the most fruitful is not suffering or misery, as much as the absence of faith.

Statistics tell us that of the 120 or 140 deaths recorded, on an average, every day in Paris, 2 or 3 are suicides. During this past week out of 884 deaths there were 27 suicides and 17 other violent deaths. Among those that die by their own hand, there are very few that believe in God, and particularly in Christ. Some received no Christian education: others corrupted by bad example, by bad reading, swayed by their passions have smothered the faith which was their last restraint and their last protection. It is not of unfrequent occurrence, for a priest in listening to the confidences of some afflicted souls, to receive such avowals as this: "Father, if I had not been checked and sustained by my faith, I could never have borne so many trials."

This is the reason, why, if it be laudable, to relieve the miseries of the body, to open hospitals to the poor, it is still more so to

attend to the troubles of the soul: to impart to the despairing the courage to live, by helping them to know, love and fear God, by pointing out to them the road to hope and faith.

Ah! how different consolation from the model of the wolf, as proposed by Gabriel Hanotaux, is the example of the God-man enduring death to relieve me of its bitterness and to open to me the way to a glorious and immortal life. When Malesherbes came to announce to Louis XVI. that he was sentenced to death by the Revolutionists, he could not refrain from tears; but what was his admiration when he saw the king as calm as if preparing for a short trip. "Do not shed tears," said the king to his former statesman, "we shall see each other again in a better world." The following day, the 21st January 1793, on learning of the heroic end of his king, Malesherbes could not help crying out: "It is indeed true, that religion, alone, can impart such perfect serenity in such a moment."

As for himself, the former patron of

philosophers, who had shared their free thought, recovered in his misfortunes the convictions of his youth. A year later, when he, in his turn, was condemned to the scaffold, he addressed his grandson, de Tocqueville, who came to embrace him: "My friend, if you have children, educate them in Christian principles: they are the only sound ones." This was the tardy recognition that faith is the indispensable *viaticum*, the only basis of reliable virtue and real happiness.

The health of the moral life accordingly demands a superior atmosphere, where it is regularly refreshed, fed, purified and strengthened. As flowers shut out from the light, the virtues of the unbeliever, no matter how highly gifted, languish and never attain their perfect growth.

On the other hand enlightened and sustained by his divine guide the man of faith feels himself borne higher and higher on the road to perfection. He treads joyfully the coarse pathways of life and traverses hopefully the dark passage of death, and everything he loves, at least every-

thing worth loving, he leaves for a time; but he will find them again.

There is an unseen native land, an imperishable shelter, where all Christian souls shall meet forever. Unbelievers forget very soon. In truth, for them, when the flower is withered, nothing remains of the perfume which formerly charmed. How could they be interested in nothingness? On the other hand, in the heart of the believer, and still more so on the Altar of Christ, the worship of remembrance is perpetuated: not a vulgar and useless one, either; but gratifying to those who survive, and beneficial to the departed. "What I ask of you," said St. Monica to her son, at her death, "is that you remember me at the altar of God, wherever you are."

The light and peace, vouchsafed here by revelation, are only the twilight, the dawn, the foretaste of the vision and the happiness rewarded hereafter, for the virtuous. Still, these glimpses and foretastes, presented by faith, nourished by charity and prolonged by hope, far surpass, in their serenity, all earthly and

transitory pleasures. What unbeliever, if he at all reflects, has not frequently envied the lot of him who in his hour of darkness, clings to something stable, and who can say: "The master whom I adore, invisible by nature has become man to redeem me; He is always present, He enlightens, helps, comforts, supports me. He communicates to me the supernatural life, which springs from the foot of the cross, He urges me on by His precepts, and allures me to virtue by His example. If I desire to follow Him, He bears me on the wings of His love from virtue to virtue, even up to the likeness of, and union with God." There is no burden which this conviction does not lighten, no affliction which it does not alleviate. In all trials, the soul of the believer seeks and finds in prayer, a safe shelter in the bosom of God. There, like the bird whose powerful wings have carried it above the sphere of storms, the soul floats in serenity, undisturbed by the crash of the tempests that howl beneath.

CHAPTER II.

The Reasons why we believe.

I. Faith is a conviction: its proofs.— II. Atheist or Catholic. — III. Obligation of believing.

I. Faith is a conviction: Some proofs of this.

In all vital questions, religion alone can furnish its adherents with light, certitude, hope and peace. Divine revelation not only satisfies the cravings of the heart, but presents all legitimate assurances demanded by reason. To examine these proofs without bias is the first requisite in attaining to faith. What prudent man would consider it unworthy of him, to study a religion the greatest minds have always spoken of with admiration, and of which its most inveterate enemies, such as Renan, could not help admitting, that it is "the best code of perfect life and of absolute religion, a system that satisfies reason and can be antagonized only by libertines."

Revelation, it is true, has its obscurities; but even in the natural order what science is there without its mysteries? Should a man continue to doubt because he does not understand, does not see, does not know the essence of a thing? Thank God, on all sides of the edifice of Christianity sufficient light penetrates the obscurity to enable us to see in the superhuman work the hand of the divine artificer who created and maintains it against the formidable attacks of all the passions combined.

With this light, interspersed with shadows, the mind does not become familiar all at once. Preparation is necessary; and God and man must share in the work. It is by a series of truths, one illuminating another, that we are brought gently and gradually to the heart of revelation.

Unless we doubt even our own existence, we must admit that there is a God absolutely perfect. Infinitely happy in Himself, that Being could remain at a distance from us, to whom He was in no way indebted. But if by considering the nature of man and the nature of God, I am not justified

in asserting with certainty the existence of revelation, still the more I meditate on the boundless goodness of God, on the vagaries of human wisdom and philosophy, on the imperative need of certainty, God and our destiny, the more it seems, not only possible but probable, that He has wished to communicate directly with a creature capable of knowing and loving Him, to speak to him otherwise than by the voice of the universe, and it may be, to condescend to unfold to him the secrets of His intimate life.

The relations of God with man, which reason of itself guesses at and which the heart sanctions, can be easily established, if we put speculation aside and study the facts.

Here we see unfold themselves, an array of truths, which illumine by their thousand rays the divine aspect of Christ. Since the beginning of the world, He fills time and space with His name, His history, His influence. He is announced and expected as a God. Open the Old Testament, and you will find described minutely the circum-

stances of His life, His death, His triumph. Even among the pagan nations, their accounts agree with those of the Bible, and they point to the Orient where a liberator is to be born of a virgin.

So there is no exaggeration in the words of John de Muller to Charles Bonnet: "the whole history of the world is clear to me since I came to know Christ Jesus."

He is not yet born and He already reigns in various degrees over the peoples of the ancient world, like the sun, to which He is compared by the Psalmist, which, even before reaching the horizon, lights up the mountains and valleys in greater proportion as it approaches nearer. Have the hopes of the universe been disappointed? To settle this question let us take up the book that supplements the Old Testament, perfecting and completing it. An unbroken tradition, all the links of which modern apologetics have verified, removes the last doubt that the Gospels have not been really composed by SS. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, that is to say, by witnesses thoroughly informed on the happenings

they relate. Now, these historians, who deserve no less credit than a Seneca or a Tacitus, their contemporaries, bear witness that the old traditions concerning the Messiah have been realized perfectly in the person of Jesus Christ. The prophecies of the Old Testament, those of the New, the miracles of Christ and His disciples, the perfection of His life, of His morals and His doctrines, His incomparable power to transform individuals and peoples who worship Him — these are what reveal the heavenly origin of Christianity. All these indicate the voice of God, which cannot be counterfeited by the creature.

Now, instead of a long series of miracles, if only one, the resurrection of Christ, were established, it would be quite sufficient to justify our faith. Providential circumstances greatly strengthen that proof. Christ has just been crucified and buried. Scattered and dismayed, the Apostles seem to have utterly forgotten that their Master had foretold that He should arise from the tomb. A few days elapse, and suddenly these same men are transformed: all preach

fearlessly that Jesus of Nazareth has risen from the dead.

Could they be deceived? Impossible: Christ appeared to them more than ten times. He ate with them, had them touch His pierced side and ascended to heaven before their eyes. Would they want to deceive us? But, to what purpose? Is man so perverse as to wish to deceive wantonly, and without some advantage? Now, study the Apostles more closely: there is in their words the tone of perfect loyalty, they admit their former errors, they accuse and abase themselves, they do not hide from us the fact that they abandoned Christ on the road to Calvary. Yet, now they are firm, inflexible, unanimous in preaching Christ truly risen.

If Jesus has not triumphed over death, His disciples are either accomplices in an execrable imposture or stricken with folly. All their fond hopes rested in Him are dashed to the ground; if they have not lost justice and good sense they must acknowledge their error. In doing so they are assured of the favor of the Jews. But, to

try to set up for the adoration of the whole world a body without life or strength and to disgrace it all with a sacrilegious lie, what a crime and what insanity! What can they hope for? Here on earth, defeat absolutely certain, accompanied or followed by unspeakable tortures; and hereafter by the eternal torments that a just and jealous God, in whom they believe, reserves to impostors conscious of disseminating an idolatrous worship.

Still these simple, timid and God-fearing men, set out unhesitatingly to the conquest of the world, convinced that some day, sooner or later, that world will bow down before their crucified Master. Injuries, contempt, cruelties the most exquisite, deaths the most terrible, they brave with a calm countenance and a joyous heart. I admit there have been fanatics, filled with a false idea, which they defended to the death. But never, no never, will men truly religious be found to sacrifice their honor, their lives, their souls which they know to be immortal to assert a fact, obvious and easy of verification and of the

falsity of which they are thoroughly conscious.

To explain the origin and the marvellous history of Christianity, by illusion or imposture, is to constitute vice and folly the groundwork of the most admirable virtues or to make the Creator the accomplice in an error or a lie. Is it not denying Providence and even the existence of God? With these dogmas, in the present order of things, is closely linked the divine origin of the Catholic Church.

Christ, undoubtedly, when establishing His religion ordained that it be handed down, one and unchangeable to the apostles and their successors; that through them it be diffused through all ages and peoples, become the supreme rule of intellect and will, giving the same spiritual birth to all, as children of the same mother, uniting them in the same faith, proposing to them the same ideal of perfection, to be realized by participation in the same sacraments.

To fulfil this design, Christ has accordingly established a hierarchical society, the chiefs of which receive their holy orders,

their authority, their symbol of faith and their mission from Him and His immediate successors, the apostles. If only one link of the uninterrupted chain that connects them with the primitive Church be broken all the links depending on that one are disconnected with the society intended and instituted by our Lord.

Therefore the divine Founder has ordained that, in order to maintain harmony in faith and discipline between its divers members, this society shall always be in possession of a chief, a center of authority and supreme judge in controversies, the vital principle of unity and life, all the more necessary in the Church, as her robust branches shoot out into time and space.

“If there were no primacy in the Catholic Church,” says the protestant, Hugo Grotius, “controversies would be endless, as they are in protestantism.” The divine institution of an infallible judge in questions regarding faith is necessary, moreover, for the education of mankind. This thought, it is well known, deeply im-

pressed Augustine Thierry in his historical studies; so much so, that it became as a flash of light which brought him directly to the Catholic Church.

For this reason, the Church cannot be a particular society, confined to a century or a nation. She must embrace all nations and all times. It is therefore necessary that she remain always visible, and to all, not only one, Catholic and Apostolic, but, holy, as well, in her laws, her dogmas and her discipline, the marvellous school of sanctity, where, side by side with humble piety, the power of miracles never ceases to flourish.

Now, these characteristic marks of the true Church instituted by our Saviour are possessed by the Catholic Church, alone; she, alone, of all the Christian bodies, is one in her dogmas and her discipline, possessing a central organ indispensable to unity; she alone is holy, Catholic, apostolic, putting on the lips of her children for nineteen centuries back, these words of the apostles: "I believe in the Church, one holy Catholic Apostolic." — "The sects,"

says Dr. Martensen, a protestant, "wish to be in touch with the Apostles; but they have lost the historical thread which permits this."

II. Whoever does not deny God must submit to Catholicism.

We can do no more here than point out the proofs of the Christian and Catholic religion; in order to comprehend their full force, we should see them developed at length in a theological treatise. Plainly stated, they are incontestably clear. It is, at least, evident that we could not regard a man as unreasoning or imprudent, for admitting them. Does a sensible man, even in the most important transactions, require more urgent reasons to come to a decision? If he have but one chance in twenty to save his fortune, his life or his honor, he reckons as nothing the greatest fatigues and hardships. Now, we have absolutely conclusive proofs of revelation. It not only answers our highest, most ardent wishes, it is not only a source of peace and happiness to the individual, to

the family, to society, but it is recommended by proofs so incontestable, that to deny them were to challenge Providence and question the immortality of the soul—the principles on which are based the difference between good and evil, the foundations of moral and social order. And so, positivists, as, for example, Proudhon in his work *Justice in the Revolution and the Church*, and again in his *Confessions of a Revolutionist*, agree that “there is no middle way for a logical mind between Atheism and Catholicism,” that the Catholic Church is the purest, the most complete, the clearest manifestation of the divine essence, that she alone is capable of worshipping it.

Many of those who reject revelation affect a so-called Natural religion; but it is a rope-dance in which very few can maintain their balance. Some, like Julius Simon, come sooner or later to Christ, who with open arms awaits their coming and receives them. As to the other deists, their god becomes deaf, blind and mute, he gives way to the god of the pantheists.

Look at Renan: after abandoning the Catholic Church, he very soon sees in Providence and the immortality of the soul, "only trite, clumsy, antiquated words." He comes to regard chastity, conjugal fidelity and the other virtues as empty titles, and goes as far as to incarnate in the life of the libertine, "the true philosophy of life."

A glance at the disastrous consequences of unbelief confirms the fitness of these exquisite words of La Bruyère, in his chapter on Free Thinkers: "if my religion is false, it is, indeed, the best set trap imaginable: to escape it was unavoidable. Whither can I go? Where transport myself to discover not merely anything better, but anything approaching it. It is much better to deny God than to associate Him with so specious and so complete a deception." In fact, how can a person believe in God, and regard the Christian religion as false. In this case, the error, if error there be, must be attributed to Him.

But it is equally impossible that the atheist have reason on his side, or that

God deceive us. So great is the abasement of the Creator in a religion full of mysteries, astonishment ceases when we think of what the divine mercy is capable. It supplies the key to the most incomprehensible things. The mere thought that the infinite power and love are the explanation of so many strange things, was, according to Bossuet, sufficient to bring back the Princess Palatine to the faith.

III. The obligation of believing.

When a man, as is his duty, seriously considers these fundamental proofs of religion, when he endeavors to realize their full value, the time is not distant, when the truth will dawn on him clearly enough to kindle an act of faith. For, believing is not merely an act of good sense or wisdom; it is a fulfilment of a strict duty. The man who, on being convinced of the truth of revelation, stops short at the act of faith shall be condemned: "he who believeth not shall be condemned." When God proposes His dogmas and precepts to us, He does not permit us to reject them according to our caprice.

To claim that obedience on our part is a matter of choice is wholly indefensible. Our Lord, according to Scripture, moves heaven and earth to teach us and point out the manner in which He wishes to be honored. He urges, exhorts, threatens; He sacrificed Himself in His human nature to cement with His blood the stones of the Church, which He obliges us to enter. The apostles repeat the teaching of Christ that there is no other name on earth by which we may be saved than the name of Jesus, and that any other Gospel, though coming from heaven must not be listened to. Could the divine precept be more urgent and imperative?

To escape this command, it may be said: is not revelation a privilege? Without doubt, but a privilege imposed on us by authority for our benefit and God's glory, on whom we depend, body and soul. Supernatural life, which is proffered to us, and into which we are introduced by an act of faith, can no more be declined, than natural existence be ended by suicide. For any one, accordingly, who has a proper

regard for God or his own interests, it is either a crime or a folly to renounce his faith or not to endeavor to recover it. He will search in vain for a serious excuse to free his conscience from this imperative duty.



CHAPTER III.

The Dispositions to believe.

I. The pride of a too exacting reason is a great hindrance.

In examining the proofs of Religion, developed at length by Christian Apologists, it is important to be at one's guard against an error into which most rationalists plunge, and which at the very outset may imperil a conversion. We may not seek in those arguments, conclusive though they be, the direct evidence and the absolute clearness of the axioms of mathematics. To demand for a series of truths a standard of demonstration of which they are not capable is a vice of method which, in advance, renders all search fruitless.

There are various sets of truths, the subject matter of which, otherwise absolutely certain, does not reveal itself to us in the same light. Some truths are more congenial to our minds, and are understood

more easily than others: they address themselves only to the intellect and in no wise concern the affective faculties, that is to say, the heart and sensibilities. The examination of religious truths, on the other hand, imports serious consequences, the thought of which is capable of disturbing the very depths of the soul. In their study, from the heart particularly, arise clouds that obscure the light of the very best arguments.

These words of Vanvenargues are, therefore, truer than would appear at first sight: "'tis the heart which is sceptical with worldlings; when the heart is thoroughly converted it draws them." Proud reason, excessively exacting, passions rebelling against the yoke of religion: these are the principle obstacles to faith.

Why is it that in this our own time, of the many souls that we should expect to see bounding upwards to God, so few recognize Him? Do you hear from time to time the heart-rending plaints of all those prodigal children of the Catholic Church, who sigh after their lost faith? "I should

wish to have my mother's faith and virtue;" "O my God, give me faith," they write in prose and verse. Why do those impulses reach their aim and those conversions prove abortive? Should it be taken as an indication that God does not hear those sobbings of a heart in trouble, or if He does hear He despises them? Not at all: the steely sky impenetrable above us and against which human cries dash themselves in vain is merely a poetic fancy. There are no prayers no matter how faint that God rejects; but He looks for more than transient whims that merely come and go.

However sincere they may be for the moment, those cries are not kept up by humble and persevering prayer, which unfortunately knocks at the door of the invisible world. They proceed from a heart that continues to serve its earthly interests and will not take its inspirations from above. If at times it humbles itself to the point of adoration, it again assumes the attitude of mistrust and pride. Unconsciously or not, we would have God accom-

modate Himself to our truly extravagant caprices. With the incredulous Thomas, we would have Christ make us feel, not only His Sacred flesh, but the influence also of His divinity. We are like an unfortunate fellow, who having fallen during the night down a precipice and on seeing a charitable guide come to rescue him, should reject his proposal and demand that he show himself in daylight.

In this regard, nothing is more sadly instructive than the crisis which, fifty years ago, landed Renan out of the sanctuary he was about to enter, amongst the worst enemies of the Catholic Religion. He too, if we may judge from his written confidences, has given expression to some regrets: but how arrogant and proud in the face of Providence. He should not have abandoned his faith, wrote he to his sister, on the 11th April 1845, "if God had given him at that moment, the interior light which carries evidence to the exclusion of all doubt." He admits, at the same time, that to look on the Christian Religion as false "is proof of a narrow

mind," because "a lie can never produce such fine fruits." In spite of these avowals, Renan who was always, as you know, a poor logician, hesitates and doubts. And, as if he was anxious to be relieved of the fearful responsibility he had incurred, he endeavors to represent the condition of his soul as the fatal result of circumstances. "It does not depend on me, to see otherwise than I do," says he to his sister: and she long since emancipated from all religion, encourages the free-thinker, who was yet undetermined: and tells him that "nobody is obliged to believe."

By timely hints, by expressions flip-pantly thrown out, this woman, whose intellectual culture and mental distinction do not lessen the immense mischief, arouses, strengthens his inclinations towards scepticism in religious matters and his rising horror for clerical discipline. An absolute want of humility in Renan, the reading of sceptical or pantheistic philosophers of Germany, when he was not sufficiently provided with a sound logic to demolish their sophisms, succeeded in

making him an apostate. It is not even necessary to suppose, that in the one who was to write later on the Abbess of Jouarre and to give such lewd counsels to youth, there were some other springs of action less potent, and which we will not mention. Anyway, we do not consent to see in Renan, as has been said, "a slave of conscience," "a loyal man faithful to duty." No, seek as you will in his life and writings, you will not be able to discover a generous and upright character.

Be assured, that when he commences his studies of philosophy and theology in the seminary of S. Sulpice, it is not the austere obligations of sacerdotal life, nor the charms of truth that attract him. He studies indeed with ardor, but it is to distinguish himself. During his hours of study, his aim is not to glorify his God later on, nor the enlightening, comforting, and uplifting of souls. Such a ministry is well for ordinary minds: he considers himself a superior essence, if we may judge from his *Remembrances of childhood and boyhood*. "The first time," says this peacock,

“my classmates heard me argue in Latin they were astonished. They saw that I belonged to a different race, and that I should take up the march just where they should leave off.” A year after, he confides to his sister, that “a budding reputation makes him feel already sure that he will be able to quit the ranks of the insipid vulgar.”

Such men are too selfish and too proud to sacrifice to truth, especially religious truth, which harmonizes badly with their selfishness. We can believe Renan, usually so silent about his shortcomings, when he writes to his seminary friend Father Cognat: “I am an egotist, entrenched in myself I mock all.” Where we can question his sincerity, is when he tells his readers, that his loss of faith is the result of his study of history and exegesis. As a matter of fact, from the time he commenced the study of philosophy, the taste for independence, the desire for destruction and the false intellectual direction he receives, from sources which he visits unknown to his teachers, throw him out of the right

way. He thinks, forsooth, that "the first requisite for a natural philosophy is to be without any previous faith." In his language it means that it is necessary to approach that study, with a real, effective, universal doubt. It is an erroneous method, and very dangerous: a man who does not take reason as a criterion in discerning truth from falsehood and does not pay heed to the indispensable resources of learning handed down by authority — such a one, to be consistent, must remain buried in scepticism.

Renan, as his confidences prove, ceased to believe the testimony of human reason, when he rejected the notion of faith. "We shudder at the uncertainty of all human opinions based only on reason."

"Very early," he relates in another place, "I lost all confidence in those abstract metaphysics, which pretend to be the science among sciences, and to resolve alone the deeper problems of mankind. Later on, Positivism appeared to me to be the only source of truth."

In short, he already doubts the existence

of God, and the Spirituality of the Soul; and instead of seeking in prayer, close to his professors or among the great Christian Apologists, the solution of his difficulties, he stands up "to challenge God." And as if he was not strong enough or bold enough to break the yoke of Religion, he seeks in the objections of philosophers, especially in the cloudy philosophy of Immanuel Kant and his followers, reasons to stimulate his instincts of freethinker. The one who claims to reject all authority in matters philosophical writes to his sister: "I am very much pleased with your German thinkers, although they are somewhat sceptical and pantheistic. If you go to Koenigsberg, do not fail to make a pilgrimage to the grave of Kant."

In a word, if Renan, abandoned his faith it is his own fault. He himself admitted, that on this score he was not without blame. We should be disposed, not indeed to excuse, but to have pity on him, when with excited feelings he cries out: "How many times have I cursed the day when I began to think! How many times have I envied

the lot of the humble, whom I see around me so happy and peaceful! God preserve them from doing as I have done." But yet there is his colossal vanity; and we reflect with grief and indignation, on the forty years spent in stifling in the souls of believers, their faith in God, in Christ, in virtue, in the future life, knowing full well that the disappearance of the Christian Religion entails the death of morality and the true happiness of the civilized world. Now all is explained, when we recollect that Renan, according to his own avowal, was inclined "to mock all" and to be devoid of frankness in the intercourse of life.

2. Necessity of Adaptation: Humility, Prayer.

We know why Renan apostatized: humility, uprightness, magnanimity of soul were wanting in him. They, who, in spite of sore trials, keep their faith or regain it, such as Maine de Biran, Marceau, Gratry, Lacordaire, Louis Veuillot, Augustin Thierry, etc., take the opposite course. They seek and love the light, not only that they may become more learned, but that

they may be better; they do not strive to detect God in the wrong, that they may be relieved of the obligation of believing or of submitting their lives to His precepts. They go out to Him with their whole soul. They know that to be thoroughly versed in religious truth, it is not always enough to have it placed before our reason as an object before the camera of the photographer. Faith is not "a chemical precipitate," which we may examine out of curiosity and without interest, "an objective phenomenon" which passes in review and before which we must remain passive. At best, the method adopted by positivists would hold when applied to questions of the moral order if the vision of the soul were perfectly clear. Unfortunately, even after the proofs of religious truths have been clearly stated, there can be in our own selves, hindrances which prevent their taking effect or bringing conviction. To be penetrated by them, we must prepare and fit our soul by a kind of interior purification to receive the light which comes to us from men, and more particularly still, that which comes directly from God.

Does not all knowledge presuppose an adaptation between the soul and its object? It is one of the essential laws that preside at the formation of a thought and even of a sensation. So philosophers have explained truth: a likeness or equation between the subject knowing, that is to say the intelligence, and the object known, of which it gives a picture. *Veritas est adaequatio inter rem et intellectum.* Now, it is evident that the better a faculty is disposed and the freer from hindrances which arrest, deflect, distort the action of the object that is reflected in it, the clearer will the truth be and the more exact. An ill-formed mirror or one covered here and there with vapor will give a confused and lying image of the object represented. More perfectly fashioned than the instrument made by us, the eye very quickly gets accustomed to distances and the dimensions of things. But a thin straw placed before it is enough to trouble the vision. Instead of an external obstacle, instead of a passing object, suppose an organic disease, Daltonism for instance, the eye will no longer be sensible to the red, green or purple rays.

In the affairs of the heart there are also facts, which, while they are clear enough to some, remain undecipherable puzzles to others. Not unfrequently, do we meet persons who complain that they are not understood. Personally I think those people are not always very clear. Still it results, none the less, that some souls are a sealed letter to mind which have a profound knowledge, but have not that untold delicacy and flexibility of feeling; and their cold and contracted temperament does not harmonize with the characters with which they come in contact.

Every severe strain between the soul and the truths of the moral order which enjoin heavy obligations on it, interferes with its understanding them: if the geometrical laws, it has been frequently said, were as much opposed to our passions and passing interests, their certitude would be questioned and combated by many sophists.

This is no exaggeration: we see every day consciences perverted by habits of crime, calling almost in good faith that which is evil, good, what is good, evil.

For instance, all your excellent arguments will never convince anarchists that their cause is unjust and immoral, if you do not rectify their wills.

It is easy, therefore, to understand, that in order to receive the faithful impress of Christian truth, it is necessary to study it with the dispositions of which Christ gives us the perfect model, and, as far as we can, to copy Him. One of His human traits, and the most striking, is humility. This is why He demands it from those to whom He will communicate Himself: *Et cum humilibus sermocinatio ejus*. On the other hand, from afar off does He look on the proud man, who, having nothing of his own, essays to treat with Him on terms of equality. His goodness having urged Him to reveal Himself, it was undoubtedly necessary that He present Himself in unmistakable characteristics. But in His quality of Lord and Master, He had at the same time the right to demand authoritatively our intellect and will — to oblige us to humble ourselves before the hidden mysteries of the infinite essence.

Perfect ideal of Justice and Sanctity, He requires in those who would approach him not so much the gifts of a superior intelligence, as the excellence of moral dispositions. And for this we must be thankful, indeed. In this way He enhances the value of religious convictions and at the same time makes them attainable to every honest will. If the facility attaining to faith, on which depends our eternal future, were to be refuted according to intellectual acumen, talent, genius or science, and not by honesty of soul or the endeavor to become better, would not God seem to prefer intellectual to moral culture: and this would be really shocking to us.

Prayer is at the same time an act of humility and an act of trust in God. For this reason, it is the most indispensable and the surest means of disposing ourselves for the gift of faith and of obtaining from heaven more light and strength. How many converts could repeat with Marceau: "I see because I have reflected and prayed." Uttered from a humble and persevering heart, prayer ascends to heaven like a

pointed arrow: "the prayer of him that humbleth himself shall pierce the clouds"; and he will not depart until it come nigh, and he will not be comforted, and he will not depart until the Most High behold: "Where pride is, there also shall be reproach; but where humility is, there also is wisdom," says Holy Writ.

3. Third Obstacle — The Senses and Heart.

God abandons the proud. He hides Himself from the soul absorbed in the thirst for worldly pleasures. It is not sufficiently disengaged nor sufficiently pure to see truth and follow it. It is not master of itself; how can it turn to God? It does not care; it lives only for those things of which it is enamored. If you speak to it of a religion, the maintenance of which is incompatible with its criminal condition it will turn away as from an unpleasant memory.

What will not the slave of his passions do, to distract his attention and to forget? Brought, as it were forcibly, before the proofs of our faith, he instinctively turns

to objections and endeavors to discover means to excuse himself from believing. Oftentimes, disregarded Truth takes revenge by gradually assuming a veil; so that conscience, unquiet at first, winds up by becoming tranquil and sleeps in an obscurity, which is almost midnight. Just as when mud rises from the bottom of a pond, the water loses its transparence and does not reflect the blue sky above, the rays of the sun are for it as if they were not. Purged of its impurities, it will become again a limpid sheet, where the stars of the firmament will be reflected: "Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God." Once a young man, having proposed to Ravignan his doubts against the faith, the great preacher, before entering on a discussion with him, made him go to confession. When the prodigal child arose from his knees, shedding tears of joy and repentance, the difficulties which he had considered insoluble, had disappeared.

We would not be understood as saying that the obstacles of believing are always those which it would be shameful to avow

— such as the inclination to sensuality or avarice. Frequently indeed, still less frequently than among believing and practical Catholics, do we meet with men professing no faith, who have lofty ideals, are of kindly character and lead lives of honesty, or, at least, exempt from those scandals which are the outgrowth of the world's code and the world's independence. On the ocean of scepticism, are to be seen those rare and privileged swimmers — *rari nantes* — who hold out, longer or shorter, near the abyss where founders the crowd of free-thinkers.

Why do those souls, whom we should call naturally Christian, whom the moral of the Gospel attracts, turn aside from the dogmas, which are its necessary basis, and remain outside the Church? Is it not a symptom of untold carelessness about their duties to God and their last end? Of a truth, the Catechism which they once learnt, if they have not forgotten it, has never been thoroughly understood. Whilst the current objections of free-thought are permeating their minds in a thousand

forms, the religious instruction which should have enabled them to smother error or resist it, far from growing up was stopped suddenly or obliterated.

4. These obstacles removed by docility, the spirit of sacrifice, fidelity to good works.

Among those men of whom we should be sorry to speak ill, the distinction of mind and amiability of character, enhanced, if you will, by a correct attitude, lend themselves easily to an independence of spirit, usually praise-worthy when practised among men, but reprehensible when applied to God.

Under a really generous spirit, lurk also the refinements of an almost unconscious egoism, which rebels against all sustained effort to regain the faith; they do not want to snap the ties that hold them back from God. How a man who denies to his mind and imagination, to his heart and senses, none of those desires and enjoyments and curiosities which the code of the world authorizes, but which religion condemns—how will he, without violence, restrain his

passions to the narrow circle fixed by faith? He needs a more strenuous desire for good, a more sustained and whole-souled effort. He must not admit degrees in his renunciations, nor reserve for himself, like Saul, the best part of the sacrifices which God asks; in a word, he ought to submit to religious truth as far as that truth reveals itself to him, he ought to be able to say that he is loyal with his conscience on the subject of faith.

Christ is truth—active and living truth: *via, veritas et vita*. To understand Him well, it is necessary to imitate and follow Him. All good works bring us closer to Him. The practices of Christianity, kept up with a real desire for light, never fail of their effect on the soul. Nor must you say, that to act outwardly as a Christian without having perfect faith is dishonest and savors of hypocrisy. Where do you see an absence of sincerity or of prudence in a man, who, taking heart to spend a life virtuous and pleasant to God, begins by doing his duty as far as in him lies, and labors to bring his convictions into keeping with his conduct?

Undoubtedly the logical order demands that reason be taught and enlightened first of all. And such is the course we must endeavor to pursue. But it would be rash indeed, to strive to impose inflexible rules on the operations of the Holy Ghost; the Holy Ghost, with an admirable pliancy, makes Himself all to all; and when the soul is right, He knows how to compound with the methods, even though they be unusual. There are souls, who need to admire and particularly love religion in order to know it well and to arrive at the certitude, demanded by an act of faith. In observing some of the precepts of religion, they get a better view of its beauty, its grandeur, its holiness. And this view opens their minds to acknowledge of things they had misunderstood. In fact, it is the truth which shows its many-sided beauty, and, bit by bit, reveals itself more thoroughly, in proportion as we draw nearer and love it better.

Was it not by this route that Maine de Biran was borne back again to the faith? Driven by a sense of his misery, he tries

at first, to find among the fluctuations of mortal things, something permanent. To approach God, who alone is not transitory, he strives to become better, he prays, he performs good works, and the delicious taste and deep peace that he feels, multiply the clearness of his intellect, and he finally receives the grace of faith: "O taste and see how sweet the Lord is: blessed is the man that hopeth in Him" Ps. 33, 8. "I have seen," said the famous Frederick Bastiat, a few days before his death, "that the best kind of people are among those that believe. I acted like them; I took up the matter in the right way — humility": and cleansed by the sacrament of Penance, he exclaimed, dying: "the truth, at last I see the truth."

This method is counselled by prudence, and presents nothing but advantages, when a man in quest of religious truth, perceives that the darkness by which he is encompassed is slow to disappear. He sees clearly, in spite of all difficulties, that Catholic Christianity, compared with the other systems of religion and morals, is

undoubtedly the best proven, the most reasonable, the most logical, the most wonderful, by the virtues it fosters, by the interior peace it gives, by the hope it engenders and strengthens. Why then should he fear a mistake in submitting his mind and heart to that sovereign rule; since, all things considered, it is still his safest course; since he can justly presume, from many examples, that the long-wished-for light, will sooner or later appear in sufficient degree to calm his troubles. A noble convert from Anglicanism, Lady Herbert of Lea, has expressed the same thought in a phrase that is startling in its picturesque familiarity: "People imagine," says she, "that it is necessary to have all their doubts dissipated before taking the supreme step. On the contrary, one must plunge in, if he wants to see and know everything; God rewards in that way our faith and simplicity."

If, however, a person have not faith enough, to undertake Christian practices, he can, he ought at least, to beg assistance from the Divine Author of the universe

and give Him proof of his docility. Even though he be tempted against God, it is still his duty, to ask strength and light. He who prays and does not encourage his doubts has in him already the germ of faith, which the grace of God will nourish and develop through the most adverse circumstances. It develops amid sorrows and deaths and trials of every sort, especially in good works, and one day conscience learns with joy that within itself the celestial flower of faith is in full bloom for ever.

CHAPTER IV.

The Duty and the Manner of Believing.

1. Besetting doubts : their causes.

God, therefore, will reveal Himself sooner or later, to him who seeks Him with his whole soul and strives to believe in proportion as he sees the light. The tiny luminous speck will grow, by and by, and remove all serious doubt. Even then, however, not to lessen the merit inseparable from faith, God proportions His light to our needs, and usually is not lavish with it. Notwithstanding irrefragable proof, the object of faith always remains shadowy, impalpable and, as it were, invisible.

Indeed, one of the conditions of an act of Christian faith is that it be free. Owing to the nature of the act, we are at liberty to exercise it or not, just as we will. Now, how could we refuse our assent to the divinity of the Word, for instance, if that

truth, which one of the objects of our faith, were absolutely transparent. It would be no longer faith, but science; nay more, if there be question of supernatural truths or mysteries, such an unclouded view of them would be simply the *beatific vision* — the act of intuition which is the privilege of the elect in heaven.

Between the one who *believes* in the proper sense of the word and the one who *knows*, the difference is not in the degree of certitude. It consists in this, that the man of science learns a thing directly from its object. He sees it in itself, or in its causes or effects, or in some other ray, which it projects. On the other hand to believe, to exercise an act of faith, is to admit something which we do not see, on the authority of a witness, who is the intermediate agent between us and the object. Clearly, if the witness be well-informed about the matters he relates, if his honesty be assured — and these conditions can be easily ascertained — we shall be as sure of the facts he declares to us as if they had happened before our eyes.

Nevertheless, when those facts are ancient and remote ones, of an extraordinary character, the intelligence, especially when spurred on by an evil disposition, feels itself allured by difficulties more or less specious. It is inclined to resist with still greater energy the proofs which come from miracles.

Now, many of the truths which belong to the domain of revelation although intelligible are however incomprehensible to our reason; and those mysteries, as it were by reaction, cast their shadows on the facts that witness to their absolute certitude. And so, even after the reason has been enlightened and convinced, all the clouds will not have been dissipated. And the higher the truths, based on unquestionable evidence, the more the mind shall be called on to put forth an effort to clear away the troublous thoughts, that, like night-birds, hover around him. The firmest and most enlightened beliefs are not always proof against those anxieties which precede reflection. Well, provided that doubt comes on us only by surprise and without our compliance, faith remains intact.

2. The remedy for doubt: appeals to reason and will.

No matter how obstinate the doubt, it is always our duty to combat it. And the task will be easy to any one who has thoroughly studied, if only once in his life, any one of the classic proofs of his faith. After a careful and honest examination he will be convinced that faith does not destroy reason but perfects it, that its object is as well established as any historical fact of which no one doubts, and that it is not only lawful but strictly obligatory to subscribe to it. His intellect, enlightened by these convincing proofs, which it cannot fail to see, knows, that any doubt, no matter what its origin, is both unreasonable and illogical.

Then, no matter how specious the difficulties, a sensible man will give them the same answer as the celebrated infidel Voltaire gave to similar ones: "if a truth is established for you does it become less a truth because it entails disturbing consequences?"

Now the facts on which my faith is based

are as incontestable as the doings of Caesar. These facts prove that Christ is God; and that He has founded the Catholic Church. It matters little that between the resulting consequences of these facts there arise mysteries, that is to say, things which I do not understand, because they are infinitely beyond my intelligence. My reason holds the two ends of the chain and calms my faith as to the invisible links which unite them; besides, being certain of the reasonableness of its faith if it hesitates or is troubled by a doubt which it is powerless to solve directly it finds in the will an allpowerful ally.

It is the duty of the will to interfere. In deciding indirectly on an act of faith, it is sufficient that the will interpose a salutary distraction to importunate doubts, that it avert the mind from difficulties more or less imaginary and disquieting, and bring it back to solid reasons, which reassure. In such a way does the skilful sailor struggle to extricate himself from rocks and storms and make for the open sea, only to set sails again at the first favorable wind to make straight for the port.

Sometimes the part performed by the will is still more prompt and decisive. Obedient to the voice of reason and duty, and influenced by the most sacred interests, it can and should directly urge an already enlightened intellect to yield its assent and compel it to the act of faith. Just as a general of an army sure of the justice of his cause, sure of the excellence of his disposition of troops, and of the advantageous position he holds, will silence the murmurs of timid and wavering soldiers, and will rush ahead of his best troops and lead them to victory.

3. These appeals to will are legitimate: faith is a virtuous and free act, no less than a conviction.

Why should not this twofold intervention of will be legitimate? Where is the man that does not every day, without scruple, brush away, by an act of his will, difficulties that clash with his opinions, as soon as these opinions seem to him sufficiently sustained. By one of these appeals to reason, Renan, according to himself, put some checks on his scepticism and

continued to believe in the reality of this physical world against Immanuel Kant: "Subjective scepticism has troubled me at times; still it never made me seriously doubt about reality; its objections, as far as I am concerned, are relegated to a land of forgetfulness; I do not think at all about them."

Still, although it is the will which ultimately determines us to an act of faith, it is no less true, that faith is an act of the intellectual faculty. For the department of reason is to discern the true from the false, to judge the value of testimony upon which faith is based and measured; and according to the credence the witness deserves to assent to a proposed truth.

The will, therefore, waits to be enlightened, before emitting an act of faith, which it approaches, as it were, from the outside. Will may be called the nerve of intellect. Both the one and the other are as indispensable to man in believing revealed truths, as the eyes, wings and talons to a bird, to discover and seize its prey.

In fact, brought face to face with revealed

truth, the human intellect with this faculty would scarcely understand. When not blinded by prejudice, the intellect, it is true, might look upon revelation as a probable fact and even worthy of credence. Still the assent, if given at all, would be weak and vacillating. The mind, deprived of that evidence which renders doubt impossible, would oscillate perpetually between *Yes* and *No*, just as it might be influenced by the arguments in favor of revelation or those opposed to it.

In any case, such an assent would be the exclusive result of a philosophical demonstration and based on it, only. Now such an assent would deserve neither praises nor rewards which are the award of faith. They are due to faith, only in so far as it is an act of virtue, and it is of the essence of a virtuous and meritorious act, that it be free.

To conclude, every soul has the right and the duty to become and to remain a believer. His free-will, by arresting and fixing reason on the strongest proofs of revelation, must contribute to produce in

it firm religious convictions. It is its duty then to lead it on through difficulties more apparent than real, towards a complete assent to the word of God. And He, as sovereign truth and infinite goodness, demands the complete homage of our intellect and heart. He has the right to require an entire faith and an entire love; and the homage of our mind and of our heart would not be entire, if it were not at the same time free and absolute.

CHAPTER V.

Faith is a Grace within the reach of every one.

I. The promise of Christ is universal.

Are our good desires, our efforts of intellect and will of themselves capable of producing an act of faith? If there be question of an act of supernatural faith, in which, by assenting to a revealed truth, or the mere word of God, we are to merit His favor and contribute to our justification, *no*. An extraordinary help from heaven, the grace of God, must intervene to enlighten our intellect and strengthen our will and to raise their acts above the natural sphere.

If this wholly gratuitous assistance from God, which transforms our works and gives them a beauty and a value, in some sort infinite, be wanting, we cannot do anything to merit or to preserve the divine

friendship; for the life, of which grace is the source, as far transcends the life of intelligence, as this latter does the life of the senses or inanimate matter: "Without me you can do nothing." John XV, 5.

Fortunately, whilst we remember that we need Him, our Saviour affirms also that His assistance shall never be wanting, and there is no one who cannot say with the Apostle: "I can do all things in Him who strengtheneth me." Phil. IV, 13.

Supernatural faith is, therefore, essentially requisite for salvation; on the other hand, no one attains to it by his own resources; over and above our good dispositions is required a particular help of God — a help which no human effort could secure, were God dealing in strict justice only.

But just here arises a formidable difficulty which has always been a stumbling block to weak souls. Can you not say to me: We understand very well that those who live among Christian people and who seek after religious truth with an upright will and a pure heart will sooner or later

come to the faith? We can easily believe that God will lavish on them the light and strength which they need and will furnish them with a thousand opportunities of learning revelation and of being converted.

But, think of the enormous number of souls on whom one ray of revelation never falls. It would be strange that amongst them we could not find some that are in good faith. Now how shall those disinherited ones come to believe? Will God reveal Himself to them in sufficient measure to save them? Show us, above their heads, the star sent, of old, to the Wise men to conduct them to the cradle of the Infant Saviour.

No, our God is not like the deist's, "a dead God," or according to the expression of Scherer "a machinist lost in the clouds," powerless to help those who invoke Him. He not only cooperates in the evolution of those whom He has created; His supernatural providence follows with merciful eyes all those souls that are capable of correspondence with Him.

That all men be saved, is the desire of

God, a hundred times voiced in the Holy Scriptures. "He wills not the death of the sinner; but that he be converted." "He will have all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." Faithful to the teaching of her founder, the Church, after Him, claims that He died to save the human race; and she anathemizes those, who, with Calvin and Jansenius, would shorten the arms of Jesus on the cross and have Him embrace only the elect.

2. Indispensable truths.

In opening to us by His blood the kingdom of heaven, Christ respects our liberty. He desires that we respond to His advances. And, not to go beyond the limits of our subject, He requires from all men two conditions very easy of fulfilment: not to place any wilful obstacle to grace, which will find its way into every well-disposed soul; and also to elicit, with God's help, an act of faith in some of the supreme truths.

Now there are truths, which it is essential to believe in order to be saved: "Without faith it is impossible to please God;

and he that believeth not shall be condemned." Hebr. XI, 6. The circle of truths, which we must believe with *explicit faith*, is not the same for everybody. It becomes wider or narrower, according to the degree of instruction of the one who believes, and the faculties at hand for developing and completing it.

What is the minimum, indispensable yet sufficient, condition, in the eyes of God for the salvation of a person generally, who lives outside of the Christian Religion? It is enough, we think, to believe in God as a rewarder, that is to say, in a God who communicates Himself by means known to them, punishes the wicked in His justice, pardons the sinner who prays and repents or rewards the good in His infinite mercy.

In speaking thus, we voice an opinion, which in the absence of unquestionable proofs, rests on very solid grounds, and the orthodoxy of which is endorsed by many ancient theologians.

The other system, which requires *explicit faith* in the mysteries of the Trinity and the Incarnation as an absolute condition

for salvation, does not impress us very much. We seek in vain for proofs that compel us to accept its too rigid doctrine. The Apostle, as a matter of fact, in the text just quoted, speaking of the articles concerning which explicit faith is necessary for salvation, mentions only the existence of God and His quality as remunerator.

Again, we do not see why the conditions demanded from the heathen should be more severe under the New Law than under the Old; and why the opposing theologians should exact more from the present-day Negro, outside the Gospel, than from the Ethiopian of old. Would they have Christ come to diminish the number of the elect, to narrow the gates of heaven, rather than widen them by His glorious triumph over death and sin!

3. These truths are accessible, even to the most abandoned.

The doctrine we espouse, helps us very much in solving the difficulty raised a moment ago. Not only is it clear to us that God is obliged to reveal Himself as

Creator and as Judge to souls who strive towards the right way and practice their duty as far as they know it, but we can easily understand how various and infalible the means which will bring a man, apparently the most abandoned, to the act of faith; and we thank God for learning more thoroughly this consoling truth: none of those who obey their conscience faithfully, strive to enlighten it, struggle towards the right way, avoid evil up to their light and strength, none of those will die without having attained supernatural faith which introduces the humble creature into the family of God.

How are these merciful ideas to be realized? This is the place to explain, and in a few words. Infinite are the ways in which the voice of God may make itself heard. They vary with the time, the country and with the person. The action of the Holy Ghost adapts itself to the thousand circumstances by which the individual's life is developed and modified with an admirable versatility. To one, He will speak by interior inspiration; to

another He will send one of His Angels or a preacher of the Gospel. It would be an easy matter to collect from missionaries plenty of facts, which demonstrate the ingenious solicitude and tenderness of Providence for His humblest children. Some have been pursued for a long time by a religious idea, which on a blessed day they found incarnated in Christianity. Some one receiving the visit of a missionary for the first time, have experienced a vague feeling that there is a master in heaven, that communes with souls by mysterious means, and brings them, if they deserve it, rewards of pardon for the past and of unspeakable happiness for the future.

And, since there is question here only of those articles which we must believe, as theologians word it, *necessitate mediæ*, that is to say, which are absolutely required for salvation, it seems that the knowledge of these truths can partially reach the heathen by way of tradition. In most false religions they crop up again in the fables and superstitions in which they have been enveloped. And so, we may believe, that

not only the Protestant, but also the Jew and the Mussulman, who does not wilfully hide away from the light of Christianity, and endeavors to live honestly, will find under the influence of divine grace, in those primitive notions, the first basis of his worship, the indispensable elements yet wholly sufficient for an act of faith. He will believe, confused at least, in God as a remunerator, upon the authority of a revelation which has come from heaven and which reaches him, he does not know how.

We may go farther. It is not at all unlikely, that from the depths of pagan religions, where they lie buried, these primordial truths often come to honest consciences, thanks of course to a particular assistance from the Holy Ghost; and vague and corrupted though they seem, excite a flood of desires and supernatural assents, which gradually lead up to an act of faith. This is the answer St. Francis Xavier and Cosmas de Torre gave to the shocked Japanese, who asked if all their ancestors had been damned, for not having heard the

preaching of the Gospel. There is no one, replied the missionaries, who does not know the primary precepts of the Natural Law, especially in a nation as civilized as Japan. Well now, by conforming to the law as far as they know it, and corresponding to the graces, which in well disposed persons will be always at hand, your fathers must have been led by divine mercy to the knowledge and the practice of things necessary for salvation.

It does not follow — it is needless to say — that the labors of our missionaries and their zeal to carry abroad the good news of Christ, are not very meritorious and very useful. It is certain that in those lands where the light of the true Faith does not shine, the means of salvation are rare and difficult of realization as compared with those lavished on Christians, especially Catholics. These like plants bathed from their birth in a supernatural atmosphere, are constantly drawn towards God, who alone, they know will give them eternal life and perpetual bloom.

In proportion as those souls are widely

removed from the more fortunate lands where the pure rays of revelation shine, the life-giving gleams of grace grow fainter; God thus wishing to stimulate His Apostles to carry abroad the sacred torch, which He has placed in their hands. Notwithstanding His omnipotence, He acts in some respects in the order of grace just as in the order of nature. Instead of breaking up the solidarity which binds one to another the children of the same father, He appeals to their brotherly harmony, excites their energies, reserving miraculous intervention for those cases where the action of secondary causes proves ineffectual in procuring the ends, which His infinite wisdom proposes to itself.

Conclusion.

The man who loses his faith or comes to die without having regained it must of course above all things reproach himself and say: "If I do not believe it is in some measure my own fault." No matter how plausible the objections which he may encounter, he can, if he so desire, obtain the necessary light and strength to resolve them. Without doubt, as his reason develops he is brought in contact with some difficulties, certain answers which satisfied his youthful mind but will not suffice now. But whilst his powers of observation have become more acute and more developed, they at the same time more easily detect the weak spots in the sophistries by which his faith is assailed; on reflection he discovers bulwarks to his faith which he had not observed before and foundations more deeply laid than he had suspected.

This is the reason why he is always

bound to put forth an effort to escape from the shifting soil of scepticism to the solid ground of faith. No obstacle must turn him aside: if he does not entrench himself within himself like the short-sighted egotist; if his love of righteousness, if his desire to contribute to the welfare of mankind be sufficiently serious to draw him towards the only one who can crown his enterprise; if he love religious truth; if he seek it with his heart no less than with his mind, God, whose grace is ever present, will go out to meet him, will calm his fears, and will show him how consoling it is to kneel down and say *peccavi*, and—by this avowal the more meritorious because the more costly—arrange his pardon. He will make him feel that the only way to realize his ideal of virtue, of happiness, of love is to be united with his Father and incomparable Friend the Saviour Jesus.

If on the other hand, he will not listen to the voice of God, if he refuse to believe His word, must he not fear that he will do violence to his conscience and his reason, and become the author of his own ruin?

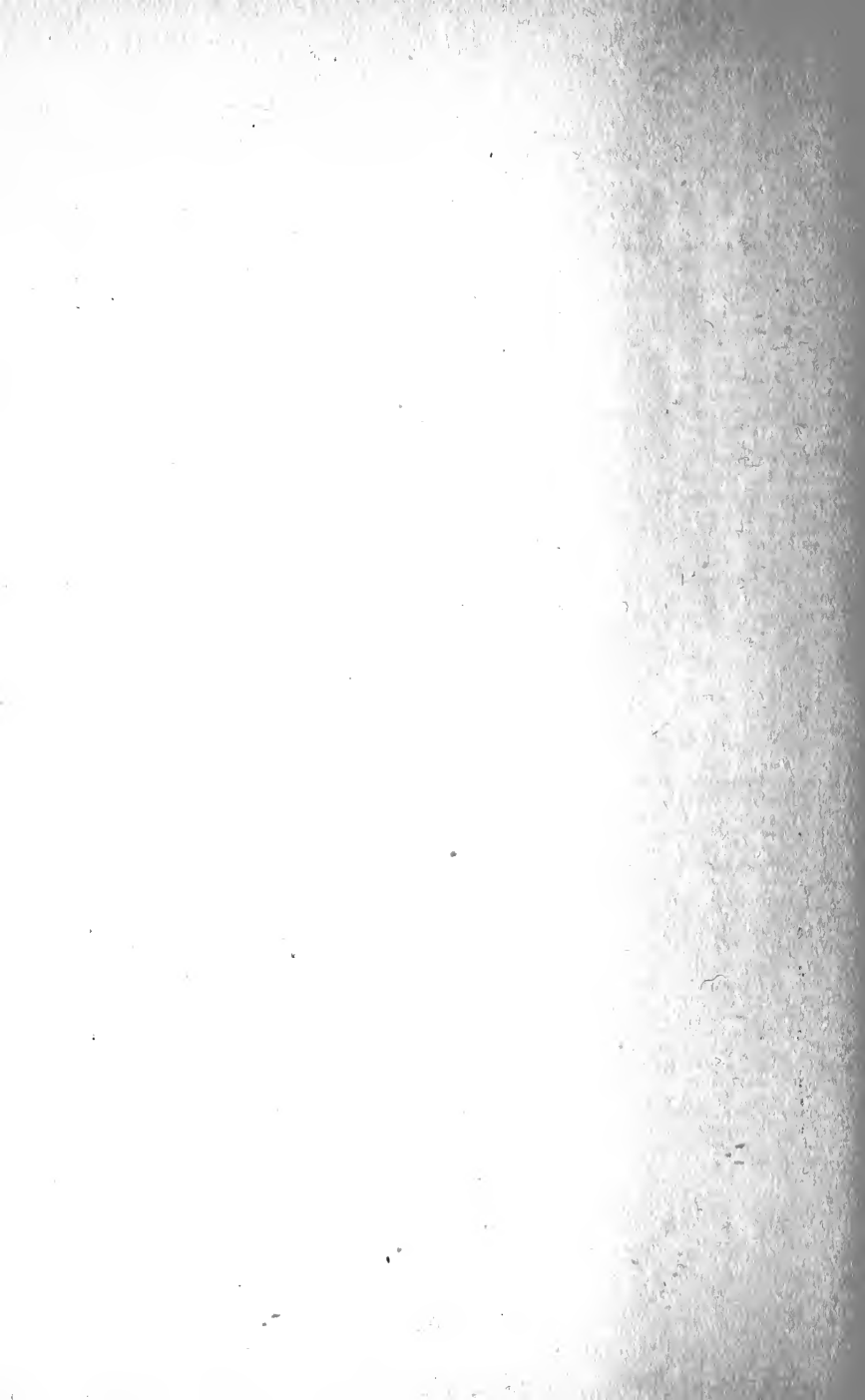
He thus robs all his faculties of the only object in which they could find the perfection and happiness which their nature claims—an object, the bare hope of which, even here fills the mind and heart with such strength and sweetness, that we can easily conceive into what perpetual ecstasy it must plunge the blessed who possess it and glorify it by contemplation.

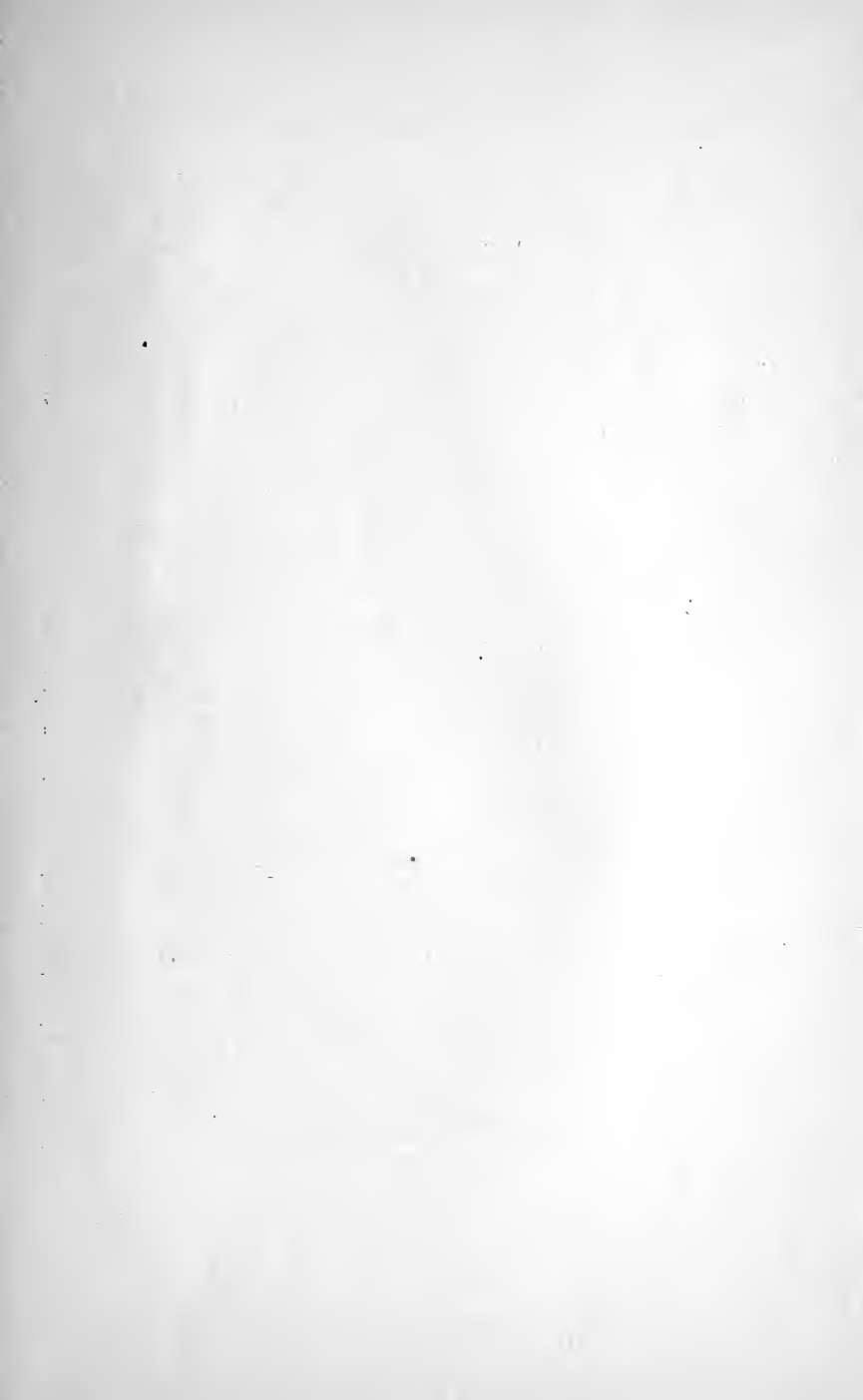
At a congress of young men held at Besançon, 1898, a writer who has since then joined the faith, M. Francis Brunetière, after proving that faith is an inherent need of the soul, recalled that August Comte, the leader of the French positivists, had recognized the superiority of Catholicism over all the systems of religion and morality. And the heroic speaker added: "If August Comte has not taken the last step it is because of a want of humility; because he was infected with the great heresy of our time, pride."

Let us hope that no one who may peruse these lines may incur a like reproach and through pride or any other motive refuse to enrol himself under the banner of Christ.

If as an individual a man reject the faith, at least, let him not check the birth and growth of faith in those simple souls which instinctively tend towards Christ and the Church. That would be as criminal as to arm the child against the father, as to dry up the only spring where the traveler in the desert might quench his devouring thirst.

The most inveterate unbeliever, if he only take time to reflect, if he enter into himself and examine in silence the yearnings of his own soul, will be obliged to admit this. For, he shall then feel the justice of this saying of the illustrious author of *Happy Suffering*: "Faith is the satisfaction of a need as well as the fulfilment of a duty."





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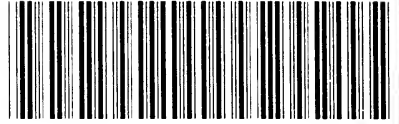
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