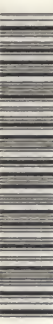


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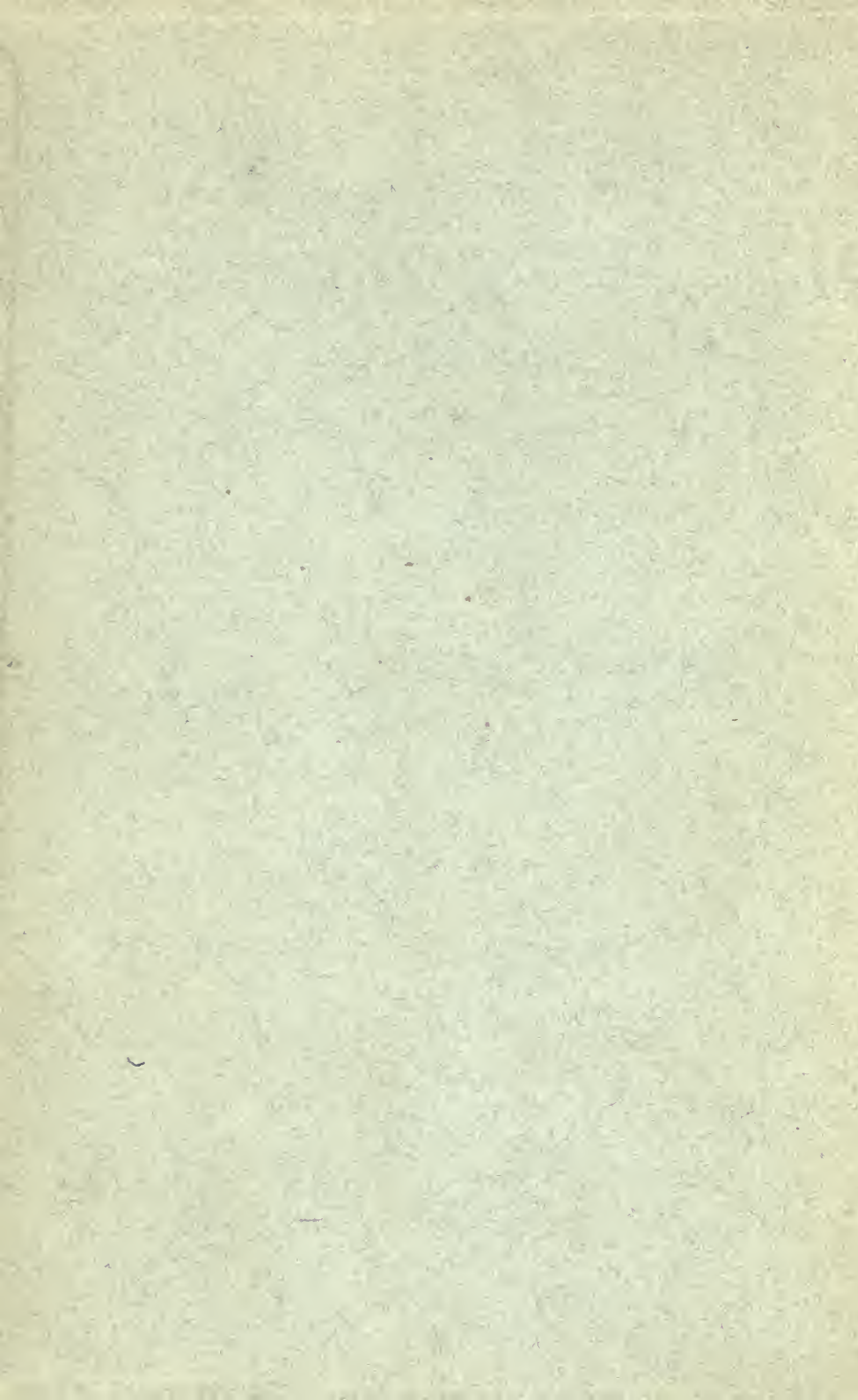
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THE

DECAY OF FAITH.

FOUR SERMONS

*PREACHED IN THE CHURCH OF THE
IMMACULATE CONCEPTION,*

FARM STREET,

On the Sunday Afternoons of February, 1885.

260
BY THE

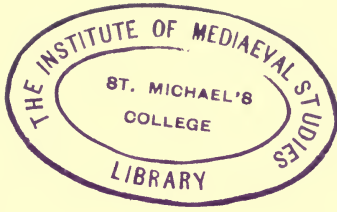
Michael
REV. M. GAVIN, S.J.

SECOND EDITION.

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JUN 21 1933

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TO THE MEMBERS

OF THE

SODALITY OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION,

FARM STREET,

THESE SERMONS

ARE AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED.

M. GAVIN, S.J.

31, FARM STREET,

BERKLEY SQUARE, W.

April 7, 1885.

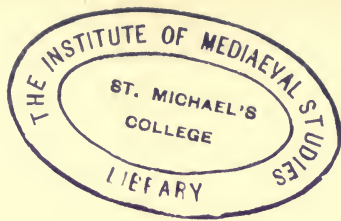


CONTENTS.



	PAGE
INDIFFERENCE TO MISBELIEF	9
DISTRUST OF THE SUPERNATURAL	23
DANGEROUS READING	41
MIXED MARRIAGES	57

INDIFFERENCE TO
MISBELIEF.



THE DECAY OF FAITH.

INDIFFERENCE TO MISBELIEF.

“But yet the Son of Man when He cometh shall He find, think you, faith upon the earth?”—LUKE xviii. 8.

THESE are solemn words, dear brethren, spoken by our Lord and Master with reference to His second coming into this world. Christ asks a question, as we should say, diffidently, if the question had been put by a mere creature—when the Son of Man comes shall He find, think you, faith upon the earth? The world is not to improve as it advances, and as it draws nearer and nearer to the great day when it is to be judged, it shall drift further and further from God, until faith shall hardly exist when Christ in power and majesty passes sentence on assembled mankind. You can testify, dear brethren, that here in England faith, the foundation of every virtue, is being attacked on all sides, while these attacks have become so common as, in spite of their

increasing violence, almost to cease attracting observation. Poet, novelist, journalist, reviewer discuss the sacred truths of Christianity with a freedom pardonable in canvassing some astronomical theory. A short time since an evening journal with a large circulation referred to a novelist, who was described as the most remarkable woman in the Victorian era, and quoted a passage from her works in which this lady utters the horrible blasphemy that the ideal of God, so far as it has been a high spiritual influence, is the ideal of a goodness entirely human—*i.e.*, an exaltation, of the human. (*Pall Mall Gazette*, January 27, 1885, in an article on George Eliot.) Views like these filter through the various strata of Society; and we may have to mingle with such as hold these opinions, and we may enjoy their acquaintance if not their friendship.

But should you say, as a great authority amongst us has said, that the denial of all the heart clings to as its anchor in life and hope in death be confined to a noisy few, still I must remind you, dear brethren, of the vast amount of misbelief around us and of the danger of our becoming indifferent to that misbelief. The immense majority of the inhabitants of this country profess a false creed which cannot claim Christ as its author. Many of our warmest friends, and possibly the members of

our own family, profess this false creed. We know them and love them, and there is much to love in them. Through our affection for them we may easily become indifferent to their misbelief. We delude ourselves, perhaps, that they are in good faith; that good husbands and good wives and respectable members of society will not be easily condemned by a God of mercy; and that without the aid of the sacraments a perfect act of contrition will free them from sin and prepare them for heaven. This indifference to misbelief I trace to a decay of faith, and I propose to study it in the light of the Church's teaching.

Indifference to misbelief is indifference to faith, a virtue of first necessity in the life of the soul. Faith is to the higher spiritual life within what the faculties of feeling and breathing are to the life of the body. Deprive the lungs of their power of breathing, and the vital spark has fled; take faith from the soul, not one single virtue can exist. The soul is dead to the higher life, which, begun in time, is to be consummated in eternity. No man is indifferent to the power of feeling and breathing in himself and in his friend; and if we estimate the worth of the soul as we value the health of the body, we should regard with the same alarm anything that even seems like indifference to misbelief.

Ill-health is popularly termed a misfortune: misbelief is not merely a misfortune—it ranks as a terrible sin. The sin of misbelief is amongst the most terrible that can be committed. It is a rejection of God's message in its fulness; it consists in a refusal to submit to the word of God claiming the allegiance of the soul; it is a calm, deliberate rejection of God. Misbelief does not spring from the transport of passion; misbelief sifts, weighs, balances, and then wilfully rejects a portion of the gospel which Christ taught for the healing of nations. To be indifferent, then, to misbelief is to be indifferent to hideous moral corruption, far more revolting than leprosy, which at worst is only typical of sin.

Consider for a moment all that faith implies and what its exclusion entails. Faith as a virtue is the assent of the mind on the authority of God revealing. Faith taken in its broader sense, is the body of doctrine proposed by the Church for our belief, and for our guidance in action. Faith is thus the one guiding principle of life; faith alone teaches us how to serve God. Every holy thought and word and action begins from the virtue of faith, is founded on faith and has its root in faith. Faith maps out clearly and distinctly our duties to God and to our neighbour and to ourselves. There is no circumstance, however difficult, in

which faith deserts us. There is no darkness too thick for its beacon-light to pierce, pointing out the one path that leads to heaven. Faith reveals to the Christian the marvellous spectacle of a God weeping in a manger, of a God who made His own every human infirmity and woe, that all might be consecrated by Him, and of a God who paid man's ransoms upon a cross, where, with outstretched arms, He is still blessing this world. It is by the faith which the Catholic Church teaches that we know Christ, our Redeemer, and that there is no other name under heaven save His by which we can hope to be saved. By faith we learn the gravity of sin, and gradually form a true though inadequate conception of that divine justice which is to be appeased, of that divine mercy to which we are to fly, and of that divine goodness which we are to love. Faith disposes the soul to salutary fear, to hope, to penance, to charity, to the observance of God's commandments, and to all holiness of life. Faith exerts its potent control over every action and in every state. Faith warns the priest, in the discharge of his sublime office, not to be cast down because there are few visible results to his labours, by placing before his eyes the great High Priest, who, two thousand years ago, closed a life apparently unsuccessful and barren of result. Faith comforts

the poor with the assurance that, provided they only perform their part, they shall not be forgotten by God, who feeds the birds of the air and clothes the flowers of the field. Faith discovers to the mourner another and a brighter land, where God wipes away every tear. Faith teaches the young man harassed on every side by wearying temptation, that if he frequent the Sacraments he is certain to overcome every danger. Faith inspires the orphan girl, thrown on the wilderness of London without a single protector or friend, with an unfaltering trust that the Almighty Lover of souls will be to her a father, protector and friend. Faith draws aside the veil that screens the spiritual world and introduces us to the mysteries of heaven. Faith speaks of the ineffable peace that dwelleth there, of the bliss beyond compare that will flood the soul through endless ages, and truly though faintly shadows forth the indescribable life of God in which this human nature is to share. Faith, in the language of St. Bernard, reaches the inaccessible, learns the unknown, and seems to hold in its grasp eternity itself.

This faith, which I have endeavoured thus briefly to picture, Christ bestows on each child of His Church. A Catholic mother can teach her child all this and a great deal more, with

a certainty that nothing can ever shatter. To be indifferent to the teaching of faith is then to be indifferent to that one gospel taught in that one Church in which men are commanded, under pain of damnation, to live and to die.

But it may fairly be urged that many outside the Catholic Church are, in good faith, honestly acting up to the knowledge they possess, and that a perfect act of contrition will blot out their offences without the special grace of the Sacraments. The large prevalence of good faith, then, considerably palliates this indifference to misbelief.

Of course, dear brethren, when I spoke in such strong terms of the sin of misbelief, I referred to that sin in those who deliberately close their ears to God's voice and shut their eyes to His light streaming upon the soul. With regard to the amount of good faith existing around us it is impossible to pronounce with certainty. Many may at this moment honestly believe their false creed, in spite of its inconsistencies, to be the creed taught by the true God. The question remains, Is their present state of mind the result of deliberate sin? Many of the Jews were honest in denying Christ to be Son of God. St. Paul distinctly reminds us that if the Jews had recognized Christ to be the Lord of Glory they would never have crucified Him. I am not aware that

St. Paul imputes their ignorance to good faith; but I do remember a very striking passage in St. John's gospel, where our Blessed Saviour, ever ready to excuse, thus pronounces, in His farewell discourse, condemnation on those Jews who would not believe. "If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin" (St. John xv. 22). These very Jews who "had no excuse" were perhaps sincere in their hostility, and earnest in denouncing Christ as an impostor, as non-Catholics are earnest in denouncing at this moment the Church which He founded. But, dear brethren, we must not forget that the Council of the Vatican teaches that God, through His only begotten Son, founded the Church, and has adorned her with notes or signs that clearly indicate her origin, "so that *by all* she might be acknowledged as the guardian and teacher of the Divine Word." You will notice, my brethren, that these notes or signs—one, holy, Catholic and Apostolic—which are far more easily recognized than the Church, else they would not be signs or notes, have been granted to the Church with this express purpose, that all, king and peasant, the wise and ignorant, the rich and poor, might acknowledge her exclusive mission, and swear fealty to her exclusive rule. On the other hand,

I freely acknowledge that the Church does not allow us to state positively that any mass of men are in bad faith, much less any individual. And most of us know from experience that there is hardly any limit to the eccentricities of the intellect, to the force of prejudice, of education, and early associations. You will agree with me in this, that in the absence of authoritative teaching on a point, we learn the mind of the Church from her saints and theologians, and I do not think either her saints or her theologians are hopeful of the generality of those dying outside the Church. Whatever be the cause, whether souls are lost, either because they die in bad faith, or because they pass to the judgment with mortal sins unrepented of, still the fact remains, that the salvation of the bulk of souls outside the Church is a very mournful theme indeed for saints and theologians to treat. They do not regard the misbelief floating around them with indifference; and to whom are we to turn for insight into the Church's mind if not to her saints and her theologians? I can never imagine a saint in England regarding heresy with indifference on the ground that so many were in good faith, or that grave sins are forgiven to those who frequently do not realize the necessity of contrition by an act of perfect sorrow? To come down more to parti-

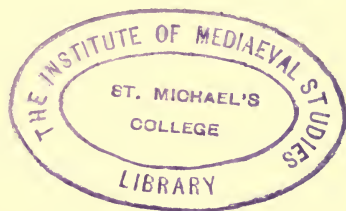
culars. Were a holy Catholic wife married to a Protestant, surely she would not rest satisfied with her husband's regular attendance at the Anglican service, and fidelity in the discharge of his ordinary duties. He might be, he probably was, in good faith: such an assurance would not satisfy the pious yearnings of a Catholic wife. From morning watch even unto night she would address earnest petitions to Heaven that her husband might be led into the ways of light and truth and peace. She would not shrink from penance or from alms-deeds. Again and again consecrated hands should offer the unbloody Sacrifice, that the one desire of the heart, her husband's conversion, might be accomplished. Her anxiety is the instinct of holiness. To gain heaven, dear brethren, we need all the help we can procure; we cannot afford to run the slightest risk in that great combat on which eternity depends. All will admit that such as die outside the Church of Christ incur a great risk of being lost. Who, then, is prepared to incur such a risk for himself or friend?

The old-fashioned hatred of heresy is dying out amongst us, hence arises indifference to misbelief. There is a distinction to be drawn between the persons and the false doctrine they profess; the

former claim our charity and deepest compassion, but false doctrine should be pursued with bitter unrelenting hate—with heresy not the slightest compromise can be made. From hell heresy came, and to hell it strives to lead the souls for whom the Precious Blood has been so lovingly, so wastefully, and so lavishly spilt. It is impossible for any good Catholic to be indifferent to the ravages misbelief has made, and is still making, in this country. It is impossible not to mourn for the sheep wandering without a shepherd, not to pity souls endowed with such magnificent natural gifts drifting towards infidelity. Yes, brethren, I have confidence in two things—in unswerving loyalty on our part to the Faith, and in earnest persevering prayer. A great country is not converted in a year, or perhaps in a century, but slowly and surely God's work will be done through the grace of heartfelt prayer. Those without the Church are our brethren, though they kneel not at the same altar. Their condition appeals to us for help by every motive that can touch the heart. Be not indifferent to their misbelief; ask the Spirit of Truth to enlighten them. He can perform the wonders here again which He wrought 1800 years ago in an empire further removed from God than even England now is. *Veni Sancte Spiritus.* Come,

Holy Spirit, send from Heaven a ray of Thy light to scatter the fogs of misbelief! Lead, kindly light, the sheep straying in the darkness. Lead them, oh, lead them gently back from the discord and blindness of heresy to the peace and the sunshine of the Catholic Church!

DISTRUST OF THE
SUPERNATURAL.



DISTRUST OF THE SUPERNATURAL.

“ Bless the Lord, O my soul, and let all that is within me bless His holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and never forget all He hath done for thee. Bless the Lord all His works ; in every place of His dominion, O my soul, bless thou the Lord.”—
PSALM ciii.

WE trace, dear brethren, the tastes and thoughts and mind of a nation in its literature and science and art. Authors and men of science and devotees of art will give expression to the floating ideas of the time. They are safe to suit themselves to the age in which they live : their productions are a looking-glass in which the characteristics and aspirations and judgments of their day are reflected. “ You shall know them by their fruits,” were the words spoken long ago by the Great Teacher, and that sentence, true for every age, has its lesson for that in which our lot is cast. It shall be known by its fruits. We, who live in the last quarter, have not fallen on a religious age. Religion has its throne in the sanctuary of the soul, and guides

thoughts and actions that accompany human life according to the standard which Christ has established. Religion lifts the soul far above this earth, which it only regards as a pilgrimage, while it considers heaven and the vision of God as the home and the true goal of man's desire. Religion deals with the supernatural and rests upon the foundation of faith. The natural order is not meant to be eliminated or destroyed by the supernatural: the former is perfected by the latter. By the natural order I mean all that the powers of Nature, of man, of an angel, or of any creature can by itself perform. But the supernatural belongs to another sphere altogether. It does not differ from the natural order in degree merely, but in kind. The supernatural is as far removed from the natural as heaven from earth. In man the natural order rests upon reason; the supernatural leans upon faith. By reason we can know God's existence and His perfections, dimly shadowed forth on the face of creation; by the light of reason we can read the law written in the heart, and love the God who has written it there. But the supernatural is known only by faith, which is the evidence of things not seen: it places the creature on a certain equality with the Creator, and by that very fact requires that the creature's efforts should be

spurred onwards by a hidden mysterious force called actual grace, which acts like an exciting, vivifying touch from heaven, and enlightens the mind to see, and strengthens the will to embrace, all that God has taught us through His Incarnate Son. Every child of Adam is called to share in the privileges and the glory of the supernatural state. We cannot, even if we would, renounce the right Christ has purchased for us. We are bound by a life of self-denial, which faith illumines and which faith consoles, so to serve Christ here as to share in the joy and the life of the Lord hereafter.

These truths are simple and plain to us, dear brethren, but there is nothing in the sight of the world outside to remind us of their existence. Turn where you choose, and you will find a distrust and jealousy of everything that rises above the unaided powers of man. Man is jealous of the God who made him and unmindful of the Creator's claims; the works of the Lord are not allowed to bless the Lord nor to recognize the virtue of His Holy Name. Take the leading newspapers which chronicle the events of the hour, what a faithful and what a sad picture do they present of a distrust of the supernatural in the joys and the sorrows, the fashions and the follies, the lives and deaths of men around

us. Intelligence is flashed from end to end of the earth; we read the words of kings and statesmen almost as soon as they are uttered at the furthest limits of the globe. The deeds of glory performed by our gallant army in the Soudan delight the eyes of some, while they moisten those of others who count brother, or husband, or friend among the honoured dead. But there is little thought of God or of a preparation for that life beyond the grave preceded by the judgment, in the sayings of politicians and statesmen, in the enactments of legislatures, in the utterances of judges from the bench, in kings, or generals, or war correspondents. *Dominus illuminatio mea*, is the grand mediæval motto which the Church inscribed on the halls of the University of Oxford; the phrase has lost its force now, for the light is shining in darkness and the darkness does not comprehend it.

This ignoring of God, this distrust of Him and of the teaching He has revealed, is all the more lamentable in the world of the intellect, and in the literature of the hour, the offspring of that intellect. Why more lamentable? Because, my brethren, intellect is one of God's greatest gifts, and intellect darkened, depraved, and debased, forfeits its heaven-sent mission of enlightening, purifying and befriending mankind. The simple

definition which St. Thomas gives of the intellect at once explains its greatness and the secret of its strength. The intellect of man, says the Holy Doctor, is a share in the uncreated intellect of God; the light of reason within us is a dim reflection of that uncreated light in which the Godhood dwells. *Lumen intellectus est participatio luminis increati.* The intellect, then, is the herald of God as surely as the faint streaks of dawn announce the coming day, reason points to God as naturally as the sunflower turns to the sun, or the magnet to the north. The intellect, freshened and purified by the light of faith, ought to be through literature a great educator for the masses. Poetry and prose, history and romance are some of the channels through which the intellect conveys its teachings for evil or for good to the world. But, brethren, I have already had to refer to one of the most celebrated writers of our time—whose works are by many considered a religion—who does not hesitate to reduce the ideal of a God to that of a goodness entirely human. Here at one fell stroke this most distinguished author, whose books are read and pondered and praised by thousands, destroys the cherished convictions of the vast majority of her countrymen and reduces the perfections of God to the stunted excellence we see around us. The

whole of Gospel teaching, therefore, is from beginning to end one vast sham: the words of Jesus Christ solemnly proclaiming that He is the infinite God, and pointing to His works as the proof of His assertion, are vacant as the air that is poured around. The solitaries that peopled the deserts of Egypt and Arabia were shaping their conduct according to a standard of merely human virtue. Those who have given up all things when life is brightest and promise most abundant, have made the sacrifice for a mere man; the worship which millions over the earth at this moment are paying in the hours of joy and the longer hours of sorrow to God upon His cross is nothing but idolatry over again! Can you be surprised, brethren, at views like these leading people to sneer at the law of Christian chastity, and to regard the indissolubility of marriage as a diabolical invention? If sentiments which outrage all the fundamental notions of religion and morality provoked an indignant protest from the press, and unanimous or even loud censure from the public, we might have less reason to be disquieted for the future of this country. But, dear brethren, our eyes fall on no indignant censure in journal or review; no loud cry from an outraged public reaches the ear. We are bidden to regard these writers as

the great thinkers of our enlightened age. We are commanded to look to them for the true idea of courage, honour, patriotism, self-sacrifice, justice, fortitude and wisdom. These virtues, brethren, were known by pagans and practised by pagans; they were described by them in prose and verse far more eloquently and forcibly than by the modern novelist. Christianity fully admits the beauty of these virtues in the purely natural order; she elevates them and canonizes them and places them in a higher sphere by setting before the mind God as the ideal, and by urging to self-sacrifice and self-restraint and fortitude and wisdom for the sake of Christ. But paganism did not know Christ, and men are bidden now to close their eyes to His Manger and to His Cross, and their ears to His teaching, and God, at the command of the creature, *recede a nobis Domine*, go away from us, O Lord, permits the darkness He came to disperse to envelop the souls that refuse to serve Him.

Some of the noblest verses of modern poetry are nothing better than the rhapsodies of a pagan. There is delicacy of expression and wealth of imagery and richness of colouring, and a keen appreciation of the mantle of loveliness which clothes rock and mountain, and woodland and plain; but there is blank refusal to mount from

the creature to the great Creator, or to acknowledge that what captivates the eye is less than the dimmest glimmering of God's indescribable beauty, while all that charms the ear is jarring discord if compared with the faintest echo from that eternal home where He dwells, from Whom is derived all that is attractive in form or sound.

The works of the Lord will not praise the Lord. The painter can hardly be blamed if he rises no higher than the novelist or poet. Why should we be hard upon him, brethren, and decry his art because he rests with the things that he sees without mounting to the unseen, or if he ministers to grovelling passion by painting on the naked canvas what a pagan might prefer to screen? He paints to please this age. Here in England painters at the present time realize immense fortunes by their brush. One amongst the most distinguished will be remembered, if remembered at all in after ages, as the devotee of pagan art. His canvas never raises the heart to higher and nobler aims; it never reminds man of God or eternity; it revels in earthly beauty, and is content with what this earth alone can offer. The painter is worthy of his patrons, and of the animalism of the nineteenth century. I readily admit the marvellous skill in execution. The loaded vine is bending under its precious burthen,

the tendril droops gracefully with the green and delicate leaf, the marble in seat and grotto and porch and columns is a triumph of art, the eye is freshened by the sight of the fluted spears of grass, while afar the sea rolls its waters peacefully, reminding us of the power and unchangeableness of that God to Whom the painter breathes no prayer. It is Nature, but it is Nature robbed of God—the works of the Lord are not allowed to praise the Lord. There is not the least indication in any of these pictures to which I allude that the heavens are always declaring the glory of God, and that the firmament proclaims the work of His hands. At least what I have so far described is harmless. But, brethren, you well know that the sanctity of this place where I am speaking forbids me even to allude to the insult which Christian modesty has to suffer in some of the pictures of the day. On such themes it is wisest to be silent. Once again, brethren, why should we wonder? If you denounce the mortification of the Cross of Christ on earth, and the glory of Heaven as the reward of that mortification hereafter as some absurd coinage of the brain, how can we expect writers to be pure and painters to be chaste?

Compare pictures like these with the most highly prized productions of the great painters



of the Catholic Church, with those of Giotto, Perugino, Raphael, Domenichino, Francia, Velasquez, Annibale da Caracci, with the faces and portraits of Fra Angelico, that, according to the testimony of Michael Angelo, must have been seen in Heaven before being painted on earth. Even though some named by me have represented what Christian modesty shrinks from contemplating, nevertheless these painters had a noble conception of their art. In their hands art ceases to be the merest refinement of paganism. Faith guided their brush; faith casts its light upon their canvas. They introduce us to saints and angels; the purity in the glance of Mary ever Virgin urges us to that life of self-denial which makes man, clad in a body of corruption, like a passionless spirit. On Tabor we are adoring our Lord in the splendour of His Transfiguration: the form is not merely human, for the brightness of God is upon it; and upon Calvary we are endeavouring to catch some faint idea of Divine resignation on our Saviour's countenance, while He is being lifted up on His Cross. Michael Angelo takes us to the dead Christ in the arms of His Mother, and makes the marble recite so eloquently the story of the ransom God had to discharge ere the sins of the world were wiped away.

Art, which had been for centuries the slave of

sense, can be raised to the position it ought to occupy only when the love of the supernatural has been infused into it. In this way alone can architecture, and painting, and music, and poetry, and sculpture be the educators of a people in the true sense by guiding the wandering imaginations of men from earth towards heaven.

But there is one scene in life, brethren, the vast realm of disease and suffering, where the supernatural is meant to exert its sanctifying influence, and whence it is often unhappily banished. I bear willing testimony to the skill, learning, patience, benevolence, and unremitting attention of physicians at the death-bed, and I frankly confess that all of us have much to learn from them. There are three professions in my judgment the most ennobling a man can follow, because exacting the greatest self-sacrifice—those of a soldier, a physician, and a priest. By the sick-bed, a physician is called upon to discharge many deeds of self-sacrifice and mercy. But surely of all acts of mercy the greatest is to warn the sick of their danger, that the soul may prepare for the judgment. This duty is almost persistently neglected or ignored. All thought of death is to be banished; the patient is on no account to be disquieted or alarmed; he must be cheered by the converse of friends, comforted by

the cheerful words of physician and nurse, and refreshed by the perfume of flowers; but death and judgment, before which even saints have trembled, are not even to be whispered, lest recovery be retarded. Conduct like this you will call, brethren, the charity of paganism; I should prefer to style it by a harsher term, as the cowardice of paganism. Paganism stalks abroad in life; paganism, with a smile on its lips and deceit in its heart, creeps into the chamber of death. How widely different is the divine charity of the Catholic Church. There presses on the physician, says St. Alphonsus Liguori, a theologian of recognized authority, a grave obligation *per se* (that is, unless it be fulfilled by some one else) of warning the sick by some means of their state, lest the soul depart without absolution, viaticum, and extreme unction. The Church remembers that happiness or misery, through everlasting ages, is hanging in the balance, and that the soul needs to be supported in the strong arms of God's sacraments; the worldly-minded physician leaves the patient in a deceptive peace to awaken to the terrible reality at God's tribunal. What condemnation is severe enough for a physician in vast practice who never warns the sick of the approach of death on the ground that they can discover for themselves the unpleasant truth? Friends are

comforted because the sick man is free from pain and dies at peace. And, brethren, if there be one thing more terrible than another to witness it is the deceptive peace that may so easily hover around the death-bed of non-Catholics. They die happy, perfectly satisfied with themselves and with all the world—why should the devil disturb them? He can well afford to wait: to disturb them now would be to defeat the sole yearning of the fiend, the damnation of the soul: that is often secured by the false peace the devil so skilfully diffuses. But many non-Catholics, you will say, are in good faith. Suppose they be, for argument's sake. How are their grievous sins to be remitted? Doubtless by an act of perfect contrition. But, brethren, is it likely that souls who have never made acts of perfect contrition in life will easily elicit them on the bed of death? Weakened in body and in mind, hardly realizing their state, or the necessity of sorrow for the forgotten transgressions of early youth, without priest, sacrament, physician, or friend to prepare them, it does seem to me almost miraculous for non-Catholics, who have led careless lives, in such a state to elicit an act of perfect contrition. And thus the last scene in life's troubled drama closes, and character after character passes from the stage, where things are seen dimly, into the clear

full light of the judgment, and into the presence of the Judge before whom delusions vanish.

The world, my brethren, thinks it can exist without God, and the Redeemer quietly withdraws and leaves the creature in life to its own devices, and in death to deceptive tranquillity.

Distrust of the supernatural, brethren, is distrust, though all men hesitate as yet openly to avow it, of our Lord Jesus Christ. That adorable figure is man's pattern in every thought and word and deed. The God who is from everlasting shrouds His power in a garment of flesh, and reveals His greatness by the depth of His humility. From others we may learn music, or painting, literature, and art; Christ reserves to Himself the privilege of teaching mankind to be holy, and of leading us through the dark and tangled labyrinth to His own kingdom. "I am the way, the truth, and the life." Hostile criticism finds no flaw in His speech; the malice of hell detects no defect in His conduct. Alone, amidst the children of men, He can fearlessly ask: Which of you shall convince me of sin? That God of unapproachable sanctity points out the true value of the supernatural. Time is to be weighed by the standard of eternity: passion is to be curbed here, and temptation vanquished, and the flesh kept in subjection; and then, in

a little while, even the body shall share in the rapture of the soul. Infidelity traces over the cemetery that death is an eternal sleep. Christ writes with His own hand, in letters of gold, over the graves where His children are sleeping: "I am the Resurrection and the Life." The body shall once again be united to the soul, human nature shall awaken, with all its faculties strengthened and quickened to the vigour of a new existence, and in this my flesh I shall see my God!

DANGEROUS READING.

DANGEROUS READING.

“Faith is the substance of things to be hoped for, the evidence of things that appear not.”—HEB. xi. 1.

THESE familiar words, dear brethren, with which St. Paul opens his magnificent panegyric on faith, teach us what a difficult virtue faith is to practise. Faith deals with the things we are to hope for in the far future, perhaps, and with the things that are not seen. We believe easily what we see, but by faith the unseen is believed, as though it were evident.

Faith demands complete and absolute adhesion of the will, at the very moment the will is free to dissent. The arguments in favour of faith are never so cogent as to force the consent of the mind. If they were, faith would not be a free nor a meritorious act, yet we know that faith is both free and meritorious. The acceptance or rejection of faith depends much on a man's moral state. Faith is a test of moral character. Men believe in great part what their habits of thought and the tone of their minds induce them to

believe. I put much stress on this. I say that as faith never can come home to us with the cogency of mathematical demonstration, there will, as a rule, be found a pious inclination to believe ere the soul bows in homage to revelation and becomes a willing captive to faith. "There is only one thing in the world more wicked than the desire to command, and that is the will to obey," was the saying of a contemptuous denier of God who died some years ago. We can safely predicate of that wretched being, dear brethren, that in such a temper of mind he will never even be near the virtue of faith, much less possess it.

But we must not suppose it possible to make an act of faith—that is, to believe on the authority of God revealing—merely because of a docile disposition. Not only no act of faith can be elicited without the supernatural assistance of grace, but even what theologians call the beginning of faith, the readiness, say, to believe the words of the missionary proclaiming the revelation of God, springs from nature elevated and quickened by grace. The Jews had overwhelming evidence before them to show that Jesus Christ was the Messiah promised by the prophets: they did not choose to accept one who made them dissatisfied with themselves, and thus their wills were able to overmaster their understandings. Our Lord's

works simply enhanced their guilt. "If I had not done amongst them the works which no other man did, they had no sin, but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father" (John xv. 24). Faith is of all virtues the most difficult and yet the most necessary, since it is the foundation of all the rest. In accepting or rejecting faith, we follow the inclinations of nature for good or for evil, and our acceptance or rejection of faith, is either a great virtue or a fearful crime. "The word of God," as St. Paul says, "discerns the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Heb. iv. 12), whether they are turned towards good or bent upon sin.

Since faith, then, is so difficult to acquire and so hard to maintain, the treasure ought to be jealously guarded. The loss of faith is far more grievous in its consequences than the loss of purity. The nameless transgressions which drew down fire on the Cities of the Plain are judged far more leniently by God than the calm, deliberate, philosophical, seemingly passionless rejection of a portion of His gospel. But no treasure is jealously sheltered which is exposed to frequent attacks, and attacks on faith are found in those writings of heretics or unbelievers which Catholics incautiously peruse. When I speak of dangerous reading, my observations are confined to what imperils faith, not to what may jeopardize chastity.

It may be well to remind you, dear brethren, that denial of the primary truths of Christianity is an offence punishable by the law of England. That law, a remnant of Catholic times, is possibly not enforced by the Bench. Nevertheless, it has not, so far as I know, been formally repealed, and still remains a protest and a warning against unbelief. If a Protestant State views such writings with alarm, surely Catholics may be expected to share in that wise timidity. Some authors never weary of flaunting their infidelity before our eyes. They are always striving to push out of the way the God who made them and will one day judge them. They persist in excluding the supernatural from this world altogether. Nature can perform many wonders; half its secrets have not yet been disclosed; a millionth part of its strength has not been exhausted and never will be exhausted by man. We are only beginning to realize all that electricity can accomplish, and electricity is but one of Nature's powers. But there are limits where the miraculous dawns, and the natural must fade away. One of the most famous literary Englishmen, in a preface to one of his books, calmly asserts, "that miracles do not exist." This is the last word on the subject. Men and women heedlessly drink in the works of a great thinker, as he is called, quite forgetting that they sap the founda-

tions of belief in the gospel taught by Christ. The Council of the Vatican has defined, brethren, in view of modern unbelief, that miracles are possible; that the account of miracles in Scripture is not mythical as some inform us; that miracles can sometimes be known with certainty; and that by miracles the divine origin of Christianity is proved. Then, alongside this infallible teaching, the Church has her theologians and philosophers to explain the reasonableness of her belief. Compare argument after argument of the Catholic theologian with the flippant denial of insolent unbelief, and judge which of the two even naturally we ought to credit.

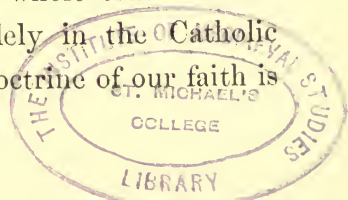
But, brethren, as I began by reminding you that faith is greatly influenced by the tone of thought, so now I must again remind you that the needless perusal of attacks on Christianity is safe to tarnish the brightness or dull the edge of faith, even when it does not altogether destroy it. 'To be easy of belief' is a grace, and this readiness to believe is thwarted by all that casts a doubt on the doctrines of natural and revealed religion, and by the captious, carping, criticizing spirit in which unbelief revels.

It is almost needless to add that dangerous and indiscriminate reading, while weakening faith, is certain to loosen the reins of passion. Few are bold enough to maintain that the progress of

infidelity is raising amongst Englishmen a higher standard of morality. Englishmen are not becoming more honourable, self-sacrificing or just because the landmarks of faith are being swept away. Respect for the weakness and chastity of women, reverence for the laws and sacred person of the Sovereign, is certainly not on the increase in a land rapidly ceasing to be Christian. The masses have an awkward custom of drawing unlooked-for conclusions, and far-sighted men, who read events and gauge their consequences, assure us that revolutionary principles are gaining a firm hold upon our people. Revolution and impurity are the children of infidelity.

But, dear brethren, let us leave infidelity and infidel books, and turn to works on religious subjects written by Protestants. Short treatises on popular theology are largely circulated amongst us, and widely read. We are apt to be attracted by elegance of style and loftiness of diction and marks of scholarship in some instances questionable enough, which such books display. The perusal of these writings by Catholics may be purchased at the cost of many false notions. Men are not allowed to write on medicine, or art, or law without special training. But it seems that theology, the queen of sciences, may be discussed and commented upon without even a rudimentary acquaintance

with the subject. A knowledge of Latin, Greek, and Hebrew does not imply a knowledge of theology. An Anglican clergyman is not a theologian because he takes a Greek Father from a library-shelf and reads him in the original; nor because he can discuss on philological grounds the force of a phrase in St. Paul, or elucidate passages in our Lord's life by descriptions of Eastern scenery. The science of theology, embracing the vast field of revelation and all that directly or indirectly bears upon it, unfolding the sacred truths of faith and the rules of moral conduct, is in the keeping of the Catholic Church alone. Theology is the science that treats about God and His message to man, and is learnt in that Church only which God has founded. An infallible church alone has the right to teach what we are to admit and what we are to reject, what to perform and what to avoid. Outside the Catholic Church there is theological charlatanism: there is no theology worthy of the name. We need not therefore be surprised to find in Protestant writers, even though they be honestly acting up to their lights, false doctrine in direct conflict with the teaching of the Church, and where heresy is avoided, vagueness and inaccuracy of statement and a perfectly inadequate conception of the whole truth as contained solely and taught solely in the Catholic Church. The fundamental doctrine of our faith is



the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, perfect God and perfect Man, the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end of all our hopes. The doctrine of the Incarnation is incomplete without a full statement of the privileges and the graces which belong to His Holy Mother. What is to be said of an author who proves his professed veneration for our Saviour by denying the virginity of Mary, whom we Catholics worship as a virgin in conception, a virgin in birth, and a virgin always after the birth of Christ? What judgment would our Blessed Saviour pass on writings of this description, could we speak to Him and hear His voice as the Jews did 1900 years ago, and ask His divine advice about reading books on religion composed by members of a sect which asserts His Gospel to be false? Surely, brethren, it needs not a prophet to come down from Heaven to announce what our Saviour's reply must be. Would Christ consider such reading safe, or would He condemn it as dangerous? While we are ready to admit that some outside the true Church offer the willing tribute of heartfelt adoration to the adorable person of God incarnate, still Christ can only be studied and learned and preached and taught under the guidance of that Church which the Spirit of Truth directs. A book by a Protestant on a religious theme is by that very fact suspicious:

it may be correct, but it may easily be very false indeed. The book cannot possibly have the real Catholic ring about it. It is not enough to describe eloquently the patience and long-suffering of Christ. Even deniers of His divinity have admitted, with ludicrous inconsistency, that the affectionate homage of men has never yet been so willingly gained and never yet been so firmly rivetted as by a Redeemer in His manger, and by a Redeemer on His Cross. Our Redeemer is loved and served in accordance with His own law, which is a revelation of Himself; and once again that law in its fulness and entirety is in the sole keeping of the Catholic Church. She alone has the prerogative of infallibly interpreting that law to the world; for the Holy Ghost has taught her all truth, and is to abide with her for ever. "If you love Me, keep My commandments." The countless duties imposed by these commandments are to be gathered, not from the vague utterances of Protestant devotional books, but certainly and surely from the recognized teachers of the Catholic Church.

But we are told, first, that Catholics are behind-hand; and, secondly, that Catholics ought to shun all that savours of bigotry and narrowness, and are to read with the times. As to the backwardness of Catholics, it could easily be shown that,

considering our disadvantages, Catholics stand high in the Army and Navy, at the Bar, in Literature and Science and Art, in Philosophy and Theology. As to the charge of bigotry and narrowness, beware, brethren, of confounding bigotry with hatred of false doctrine. Bigotry, like Ultramontaniam, is often nothing else than love of gospel truth pure and unadulterated. It is not bigotry to take Christ's side, to love the doctrine He loves and to hate what He hates, and to cling, even with the sacrifice of life, to all He has deigned to transmit. Divine truth is one and indivisible. We cannot part with it, nor lessen the hold it has upon us without drifting from Jesus Christ. Remember, too, that the Jews accused our Lord of bigotry. He gave them from time to time a great many unpleasant tidings which clashed with their cherished convictions, and therefore, in the opinion of the wise and the learned of those days, Christ must have been a bigot. The Catholic Church, which shares in the glory of her Founder's shame, is regarded by the learned and the great as a bigot. She has been honoured with hard names before this and has survived them, and we need not be disturbed about trifles. It is true the Church commands us to be charitable and indulgent to persons, but the printed page carries its praise or censure with it.

Should the mind of the Church even be unintentionally misrepresented in her vast demesne of faith and morals, then that page is beneficial to none and dangerous to many; if it advocate wrong and unbelief, its effect is secret, insidious, and deadly like pestilential air.

All well-directed reading, brethren, like sound education, may help considerably the life of the spirit. Reading throws light about us and increases light within us. It is remarkable, too, that when God has raised illiterate persons to high perfection, He has often infused into them supernatural science, thus enabling them to be accomplished theologians. No one would for a moment undervalue the immense power which writers possess, and the wide influence they exert. A good book is not only a charming companion, but it may easily become, in God's providence, a safeguard against various classes of sin and a heavenly grace. A book against one gospel tenet is to the incautious a passport to perdition.

I am specially desirous of cautioning you, dear brethren, against the indiscriminate reading of those attacks, open or veiled, on all forms of belief which, in these days of much printing, are so persistently obtruded upon us. For such books are directly opposed to the humility of faith as inculcated by Christ. The Gospel was propagated

by methods which the proud wisdom of this world would never have invented. Disciples were chosen by Christ to spread His Gospel remarkable for the absence of all those gifts which naturally attract; twelve fishermen, of rude and unlettered speech, were the heralds of Christianity. From their lips the king and the peasant, the learned and the foolish, were alike to learn what is necessary for salvation. The fishermen were to speak and men were to listen; the fishermen were to teach and men were to learn; the fishermen were to order and men were to obey. These fishermen still live in their representatives. The message is the same now as that delivered by the apostles to Athens and Corinth and Ephesus and Rome. The dispositions for receiving that message, and for keeping it when received, are still the same. Chief amongst these dispositions is the humility and docility of a child. "Unless you be as little children you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven." How much have we all to learn from the trustful simplicity of childhood; how profound the wisdom hidden beneath the ignorance of the little ones of Christ. A child rests at its mother's knee, and listens and believes, and never dreams of doubting or criticizing, a child has too much sense. Christ asks for submission not for criticism. Receive His mandates from authorized

ministers. Treasure your faith as the most precious heirloom God has entrusted to your charge. The creature is never so great as when docile and humble, never so free as when a captive to the sweet thralldom of faith. That one act of homage, "I believe, O Lord," is of priceless value in the Creator's eyes. "Because thou hast seen, Thomas, thou hast believed; blessed are they who have not seen and have believed."

MIXED MARRIAGES.

MIXED MARRIAGES.

“Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved His Church, and delivered Himself for it.”—EPH. v. 25.

BEFORE weighing the judgment which the Church passes on mixed marriages, permit me for a moment, dear brethren, to consider what the Church means a Catholic marriage to be.

It is a dogma of faith that our Saviour raised marriage to the dignity of a sacrament, and He has also, in surpassing condescension, made the union between man and woman emblematic of the everlasting union which exists between Him and His Church. When Christ made marriage a sacrament, He wished to sanctify and elevate the natural affections of the heart. Christ knows the human heart because He made it, and He realizes, as no one else can, its waywardness and inconstancy. When, in the spring-time of life, man and woman engage, as a pledge of mutual affection, to pass their days together, through good and ill-repute, in sunshine and in storm, the Church, by the wish of its Founder, leads them to the foot of the altar where our Saviour

abides to solemnize the contract. The promise mutually made in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament calls down from heaven—where marriage vows are registered—sanctifying grace, that share in God's uncreated nature; and our Blessed Saviour Himself gives sanction to the promise and grace for its fulfilment. As if to show her joy at the union the Church arranges a special nuptial mass and bestows a nuptial blessing. The love which knits two hearts together is lifted far above this sordid earth; it is purified, strengthened, spiritualized and sanctified, it becomes like unto the mutual affection of Christ and His Church. It is impossible to place before the soul a higher ideal or standard of affection. A husband is to love his wife with the pure enduring love of Christ for His Church; and a wife is to regard her husband with the fond reverence of the Church for Christ. A husband is to imitate the care, solicitude, and, above all, the self-sacrifice of Christ for His Church; and a wife is to repay that self-sacrifice with the unfaltering, loyal, trustful homage of a grateful soul. Mutual love, esteem, and reverence should never for one moment falter. The Church in every danger turns to Christ, for He is beside her on the troubled waters. A wife finds in a husband, amidst life's countless trials and wearying per-

plexities, a tower of strength, and in his affection a return compensating a thousand times the loss of the home of her childhood, which she abandoned for him. In the tough battle which a man has to fight, and in the bitter trials which he is obliged to bear, God means a husband to find in his wife an exhaustless fountain of tenderness and sympathy. A union such as this, rooted in natural affection, where dispositions agree and continue to harmonize, sanctified by religion, makes home on earth, in its purity and peace, a type of that everlasting home in heaven where God dwells in purity and in peace. The Church with a divine instinct for all that advances the eternal, and, therefore, the temporal happiness of her children, is eager to promote, by every means in her power, marriages amongst Catholics. She recognizes in a happy marriage a great preservative against that vice which wrecks the Christian home, silvers the hair before its time, drives wretched mortals to nameless and dishonoured graves, slays more victims than shot or shell or rifled cannon, and peoples hell with millions of victims; while Catholic marriage, on the other hand, my brethren, is the guardian of chastity. Even the wicked are bound to respect the purity of a wife, and the purity of a mother; and no violence, short of bloodshed, would be thought

too much to punish one who dares cast a slur on the purity of a wife and the purity of a mother.

Now, dear brethren, after this brief introduction, let me turn to the question of mixed marriages. I have said that the Church encourages in every way in her power marriages between Catholics, in more or less the same rank, and where natures agree and ideas harmonize. Yet this same Church, with the absorbing interest in souls which she received from her Master, has always viewed marriages between Protestants and Catholics not only with dislike but with positive detestation. Benedict XIV. is responsible for the words: *Ecclesia semper detestata est hæc matrimonia*. The Church has always held such marriages in detestation. Pius VIII., on the 25th of March, 1830, wrote to the Bishops of Prussia on the subject of mixed marriages, and protested at the foot of the Crucifix that the concessions wrung from him—in dispensations for such marriage—were granted only to prevent greater evils. The Church, therefore, through her Sovereign Pontiff, warns her children that she does not merely dislike, but that she hates mixed marriages. Stronger language cannot be employed. These are not the random expressions of every-day conversation, nor the heedless, slipshod, irresponsible utterances

of a journalist, but the weighty words of a Pontiff addressing the Church for which before God he is responsible.

But, dear brethren, you may fairly ask me why the Church, while promoting marriages between Catholics, hates marriages between those who differ in religion. Two reasons at least may be offered. First, because the Church, from her vast experience and far more from her Divine instinct, knows these marriages are often unhappy; secondly, and chiefly, because such marriages lead to the weakening if not to the shipwreck of faith.

The Church fears such marriages will be unhappy even in this world. No married person in this vast congregation will quarrel with me for saying that many marriages, even between those who profess the same faith, are unhappy. Many a woman, after two or three years of married life, awakes to the sad reality that she is yoked to one whose nature does not beat in sympathy with hers, whose tastes are different and whose paths in life lie far apart, and if she revealed the secrets of her heart as she reveals them to her God she would give half the world to begin life over again and to make another choice. On a woman falls, be it well remembered, the hardest part of married life in every sense and in every way. If blessed in the affection and sympathy of her husband, and

in the joyous love of her children, a wife's home is an empire over which she rules with undisputed sway. But if unblessed with the love of him she swore at God's altar to reverence, she moves in society desolate and unhappy, even though no one may penetrate the sorrow of her soul. Many a man, after a short experience of married life, when the glamour of affection has vanished, discovers that he has thrown away that great treasure, the love of an honest heart, on a vain, giddy, selfish, frivolous woman, on one who is perfectly unaware of the duties and responsibilities that belong to the position of a Catholic wife. Now, brethren, allow me to ask you this simple question: Are man and wife likely to agree the better because on the most important point, that of religion, they are bound to differ? Religion is not like a court dress to be taken off and on or reserved for state occasions. It enters into every action of life and colours the whole being. Religion can never be put aside except by the impious, and I am not speaking of them at this moment. I address myself to such as are anxious to save their souls. As life speeds forward there must of necessity be in the happiest marriage constant trials, contradictions from without and from within, sickness of body and more painful sickness of mind, unkindness from relations and friends, the anxiety in-

separable from a family, possibly straitening of means, and the hardships embraced in the phrase—the turmoil and trouble of the world. Where all this and much more may easily darken the path, how are man and wife to find solace “for better for worse for richer for poorer,” if not in the same faith and by kneeling before the same altar? Further, dear brethren, you will agree with me that everything should be done to promote natural affection between those who are married, and every barrier to love should be carefully and jealously removed. When fearful scandals arise, and marriage vows are broken, one cause, if not the chief, is the cooling of affection. But difference of opinion on vital points is pretty safe to produce conflict of minds; and once again, dear brethren, let me repeat the question already proposed: Are man and wife likely to agree the better because on the main thing, that of religion, they are bound to differ?

I may be met with the objection that since the Church grants a dispensation for a marriage between a Catholic and Protestant, she cannot be said to detest it. Surely, dear brethren, when Benedict XIV. made use of the words quoted above, the Church has always held such marriages in detestation, there was no necessity for him to say he hated such a union *without a dis-*

pensation, because such a union would be of itself sufficient to incur a grave sin. A dispensation makes that lawful which without such dispensation would have been unlawful, but it does not necessarily make it praiseworthy. There is a broad line of demarcation to be drawn between what is lawful and what is desirable. Very often the Church cannot help these marriages; she is obliged to tolerate what she is powerless to hinder. She warns her children in the strongest language, but if they still persist in demanding a dispensation, she grants it on condition that all the children be brought up in the Catholic religion.

Let us suppose a case where a Catholic woman marries a Protestant. A husband's word has been pledged that the children are to be Catholics, and, trusting to the promise, the Church grants the dispensation. But the word may be broken, my brethren, and then what is the position of the Catholic wife, and still worse of her unfortunate children? A man's word of honour is rather a slender reed on which an eternity of weal or woe in the world to come is to depend. The old motto *Noblesse oblige* is perchance losing its force amongst us; possibly the word of honour is not so sacred amongst men of high position; and gentlemen, who should set the example to others, have lost the noble tradition of allegiance to

their plighted word, and English courts of justice support the violation. A Catholic mother may have to see the child she has borne reared in a faith which she is bound to believe cannot of itself lead the child to heaven. Assume a favourable instance—the children are educated Catholics; even then there are many drawbacks. How can they respect and reverence their father, as holding the place of God, if they are taught to believe that he professes a false faith which gives the lie to God? These children must be forbidden ever to address their father on matters of religion lest their trustful natures be led astray. If the father be in good faith in a sense, the position of the children becomes more dangerous. A father's fidelity to his phase of belief may induce him unconsciously to influence his children; or they may easily begin to think that all forms of faith are equally acceptable because all claim good men among their adherents.

Again let me imagine what may easily happen, that after five or six years of married life, a Catholic wife lies on her death-bed with two or three little ones weeping around her. When she has gone, a Protestant lady, full of bitter prejudice, may fill the place that is soon to be vacant, and the orphan children are to be reared as Catholics, by parents professing a creed which, say

what you will, with the instinct of heresy, must hate the Church. Death is bitter at all times, dear brethren, do not make the separation still more bitter for the poor mother who is going before God.

If the wife be Protestant, then indeed is the lot of the children most unenviable. A mother's control over her child, a mother's sweet and gentle influence, has no equal on this earth. It is the dearest privilege of a Catholic mother to teach her child its first prayer, to inspire the heart while fresh and pure and tender with a reverence for God, for His angels, and saints, and for Blessed Mary ever Virgin. Every man will admit that whatever good there is in him is due in great measure to the teaching, training, advice, and example of a holy Catholic mother. God entrusts to a mother, in the sanctuary of her own home, those children so dearly coveted by the Sacred Heart. But if the mother be Protestant all God's plans are thwarted. The children are Catholic, you will say. Yes; but a husband may constantly be away from home, or busy in multitudinous occupations—as a lawyer buried in his briefs; as a doctor engaged with his patients; as an officer with his regiment at the ends of the earth; as a sailor with his ship on the boisterous sea; and a stern command is laid upon a mother never to

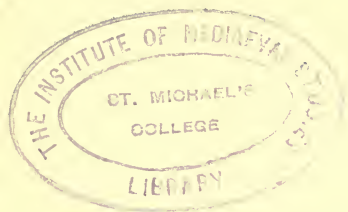
speak to her children of the countless themes that religion embraces. Another must be brought into the household to teach, who will be the first to admit that she never can claim to possess, in the same degree as a mother, the influence, the homage, the sympathy, and the confidence of the child. God and Nature have both combined to teach the child to love and reverence its mother. The ears of a child are open to the whispering of a mother, as naturally as the petals of a flower to the morning dew, and at once you rob these poor children of the inestimable advantage God intends them to enjoy. They have all the world before them; soon they shall have to pass from the comparative solitude of home into the world, where so many are dazzled and so many led astray—the girl perchance into fashionable society, which will not make her more like to Mary ever Virgin, and the boy takes his place in the race where temptation surrounds him on every side, and the very air he breathes is poisoned with unbelief. Why need you be surprised, brethren, if Catholic priests with wide experience assure you that such children suffer shipwreck of the faith, while Liberalism and indifference to all religion on the part of parents is one of the curses God permits to follow in the wake of mixed marriages?

It is the duty of parents to instil into children

from their tender years a horror of mixed marriages, so that a Catholic may be taught to regard union with a member of a false church as a thing not to be thought of except in very extreme circumstances. In this way the chances of mixed marriages are considerably diminished, by the eyes of the young being opened to the dangers which surround these unions. They should be taught to hate them with the holy hatred of the Church. Catholic gentlemen are much to be blamed in choosing wives from the ranks of Protestant society in preference to Catholic women, so many of whom are suited by virtue, birth, education, and refinement to grace and adorn any home in the land.

If mixed marriages are on the increase amongst us, my brethren, the cause can easily be traced to the decay of faith. We are becoming suspicious of the sweet rule of the Church. We forget that the Spirit of God governs her in all her commands and ordinances, and that when, through the mouth of her Pontiff, she expresses her hatred of mixed marriages, it is not for Catholics to doubt, to carp, to criticize, or to cavil, but simply and solely to obey. The Church is of all legislators the wisest and the most indulgent, and by the condemnation of mixed marriages she is merely desirous to obtain the temporal and eternal happiness of those

entrusted to her charge. The Church has a divine mission: she is supreme in all things spiritual. Matrimony belongs to her domain alone, since it is a sacrament, and it is always safe even for earthly happiness to be on the side of the Church, dangerous to be on the side of her enemies. The Church hates mixed marriages, because she yearns to maintain peace and happiness and purity in homes so often thwarted and lost by these ill-assorted unions. The Church hates mixed marriages as dangerous to the faith of parents and of children. In the conception of the Church father and mother and child should regard their own home as the holiest spot in all the earth after the chapel where Jesus Christ dwells. Home can only be holy when mutual affection is elevated and sanctified by religion, where parents worship at the same altar, and teach their children by word, and more still by example, unswerving loyalty to that faith which can alone guide us in the dangers of life and solace us in the agonies of death. A Catholic home in which the love and the law of the Lord binds the inmates together, thus becomes in its union and purity the mirror of that "blessed vision of peace" which shall one day burst upon father and mother and child after the exile is over, when those who have served God here and faithfully kept His commandments, shall claim Him as their everlasting inheritance in the City of the Saints.



OPINIONS OF THE PRESS.

“In these four sermons Father Gavin deals not with the decay of faith in the world at large, but with the evil effects of that decay upon Catholics who are not upon their guard to fortify themselves against the influences of the surroundings in which they may perforce dwell. We cannot escape from the age in which we live, but we can recognize its dangers, and a frank recognition of these dangers is the first step towards safety. The preacher in these sermons dwells first upon indifference to misbelief; he urges that such indifference can spring only from a failure to realize the value of the faith, the hateful evil of error, the miserable condition of its victims. ‘I can never imagine,’ he says, ‘a saint in England regarding heresy with indifference, on the ground that so many were in good faith, or that grave sins are forgiven to those who frequently do not realize the necessity of contrition by an act of perfect sorrow.’ Then he proceeds to call attention to another evil symptom of the time, what he aptly names ‘the distrust of the supernatural,’ the readiness with which in art, literature, and science, men acquiesce in limiting the view to mere natural things, without rising to the thought of their Maker, and of the spiritual world that is no less real than the world of sense which veils it from us. The same spirit leads men to look to natural interests before those of eternity, and the preacher makes this aspect of his subject a very practical one by denouncing the heartless folly of those who, for fear of alarming the dying man, let him pass unprepared into the presence of his Judge. The third sermon has for its subject ‘Dangerous Reading,’ not that kind of reading which is a danger to purity, but that which is a source of danger to faith. Its opening pages contain a singularly clear exposition of a most difficult subject, the Catholic doctrine of the dispositions required for an act of Divine faith. Then, having shown how much faith is influenced by the whole tone of thought in a man’s mind, he points to dangers that we fear are not always

fully realized even by educated Catholics, not merely the peril of reading infidel or rationalistic books, but the danger of developing an un-Catholic frame of mind, and an inaccurate idea of the truths of faith by the study of even well-intentioned works of Protestant writers on religious topics. The fourth and last sermon, having set forth the Catholic doctrine on Christian marriage, gives an eloquent warning against the evils of mixed marriages, and shows how they imperil the faith of the children, and the happiness of parents and children alike. Father Gavin rightly insists that for any one to regard such marriages as anything but an evil, unless in the most exceptional circumstances, is a sign of a decay of faith, a want of true Catholic spirit. . . . We have here words of warning, calmly and gravely spoken, and without any of the exaggeration that comes of straining after rhetorical effect."—*The Month*, May, 1885.

"'The Decay of Faith' is the title which Father Gavin gives to four sermons preached by him in Farm Street Church, London, on the Sunday afternoons of February last. All of them—'Indifference to Misbelief,' 'Distrust of the Supernatural,' 'Dangerous Reading,' and 'Mixed Marriages,' are well suited, we may be assured, to the needs of the audience for whom they were primarily intended; and all of them may be read with great profit by ourselves. To all our people, we can heartily recommend Father Gavin's Sermons on the 'Decay of Faith.'"—*The Irish Monthly* June, 1885.

"We are particularly glad to welcome the appearance in print of four sermons by Father Gavin, and we sincerely hope they may be but the first instalment of a series. In the sermon on 'Distrust of the Supernatural,' the preacher points out that the majority of modern writers and artists, although they show a keen appreciation of the beauties of nature, refuse 'to acknowledge that what captivates the eye is less than the dimmest glimmering of God's indescribable beauty, while all that charms the ear is jarring discord if compared with the faintest echo from that eternal home where He dwells, from whom is derived all that is attractive in form and sound.' He contrasts the works of the great Catholic artists with the semi-pagan picture of modern painters, and he maintains that only 'when the love of the supernatural has been infused into it,

can architecture and painting, and music, poetry, and sculpture be the educators of a people in the true sense, by guiding the wandering imaginations of men from earth towards Heaven.' Turning to science, after rendering a graceful tribute to the skill, benevolence, and patience of the medical profession, he laments that in too many instances physicians neglect to warn the sick of their danger, when their 'happiness' or misery through everlasting ages is hanging in the balance,' lest the patients should be disturbed; and thus, he tells us, 'paganism, with a smile on its lips and deceit in its heart, creeps into the chamber of death.' Both in this sermon, and in that which follows it on 'Dangerous Reading,' there are several passages—too long for quotation—of remarkable power and beauty."—*Tablet*, May 2, 1885.

"Under the title of 'Decay of Faith,' four sermons preached in the Church of the Immaculate Conception, Farm Street, on the Sunday afternoons of February last, by the Rev. M. Gavin, S.J., have been brought out in pamphlet form. The subjects are: 'Indifference to Misbelief,' 'Distrust of the Supernatural,' 'Dangerous Reading,' and 'Mixed Marriages.' A great many useful lessons are inculcated in these sermons in language which is truly eloquent."—*Catholic Times*, May 1, 1885.

"Rev. M. Gavin, S.J., deserves the thanks of the Catholic public of these countries for re-publishing in pamphlet form, at the accessible price of one shilling, his four sermons preached in the Church of the Immaculate Conception, London, on the Sunday afternoons of February last. The titles of the discourses are suggestive, and will, we venture to believe, be accepted by every thinking Catholic as explanatory of the decay of faith. These are: 'Indifference to Misbelief,' 'Distrust of the Supernatural,' 'Dangerous Reading,' and 'Mixed Marriages.' The sermons have the merit of brevity, but they are pregnant with food for thought, the logic is keen and incisive, the illustrations are frequent and felicitous, and the style is eminently cultured. Every page of this little work deserves the most careful and reverent study."—*Waterford Citizen*, April 21, 1885.

Gavin, Michael

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241

The decay of faith

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