

G4 993

FROM ROME  
TO RATIONALISM

OR

WHY I LEFT THE CHURCH

BY

JOSEPH McCABE

(LATELY VERY REV. FATHER ANTONY, O.S.F.)

[ISSUED FOR THE RATIONALIST PRESS ASSOCIATION, LIMITED]

LONDON :  
WATTS & CO.,  
17 JOHNSON'S COURT, FLEET STREET, E.C.

1910

*First Edition, 1897*  
*Second Edition, 1902*  
*Third Edition, 1905*  
*Fourth Edition, 1907*  
*Fifth Edition, 1910*

## From Rome to Rationalism

---

It is a familiar practice of the rhetorical defender of a religious sect to compare the calm security of his Church amid the ceaseless conflict of its adversaries to the security of an island that is sheltered by a rock-bound coast from the sleepless fury of the ocean. Its members are taught to smile at the convulsive movements to which each succeeding age gives birth, to regard them as the waves of a restless element that spends its vain fury for a time on their frontiers, only to fall at length in helpless confusion at their feet and retire into its native depths. Storm after storm has lashed their iron shores, until men's hearts were troubled at the deepening gloom and the wild chaos of the elements; but the sun has shone forth once more in radiant triumph, and the whitened cliffs have smiled grimly on the retreating sea—a typical picture of permanence in this restless universe. But the fatal fallacy of rhetoric lurks here, as in so much of the ornate language with which shallow speakers calm the disquietude of unreflecting multitudes. There is no immovability in the universe; from the tiny atom to the most colossal sun all is motion and change. The constancy of an iron-bound coast is an illusion, a hasty and superficial estimate. Slowly, but surely, each line of beetling cliffs that seems to scorn the fury of the ocean is falling a victim to its ravages. Each wave that breaks in seeming impotence has inflicted an irreparable injury upon it, and prepared the way for its successor; each tide that gently murmurs at its feet is weakening its foundations. And the days will come when its worn and enfeebled structure will yield, and the fairest lands become a prey to the devouring waves.

Thus also do those think who have seriously pondered over the vicissitudes of the Churches during the last few

centuries. Their internal conflicts have weakened the bonds of union, and dissipated their forces in fratricidal strife; political power has emancipated itself from their usurped dominion, and often in reaction resorted to violent measures; while the waves of thought that have swept over civilised Europe during the last century and a half have riven their foundations and devastated some of their fairest provinces. No strain is more familiar to their prophets of these latter days than the decay of faith and the poisoning of the wells; the solitary cry of a religious writer does but accentuate more strongly the ominous silence, if not the anti-religious character, of all literature that is not professedly apologetic. Rationalism, with its cold, impartial analysis of sacred documents, made the first deep impression on theological structures; strive as men will to dilute their dogmas into some proportion with modern knowledge, the power of ecclesiasticism cannot be the same to any thinking man after so grave an impeachment of its credentials. Philosophical criticism, armed as it now is with the thoughts of the great minds of every age and every clime, has thrown so powerful a light on the weakness of the traditional philosophy, which must necessarily form the basis of any structure of faith, that able men are found to spend all their time in making an *irrational* theology acceptable—in making morals or sentiment, tradition or authority, a plausible approach to an act of faith. Physical science has revolutionised our view of our environment, and is rapidly filling up the lacunæ in a mechanical conception of the universe on which men would base their inferences of a spiritual world.

Apart from these great movements, that have cast huge waves not in vain on the frontiers of religious sects, a steady erosive action has been at work, preparing the way for their more effective ravages. Time was when all men's thoughts were infused into them by their guides and teachers, and they were content to acquiesce with unquestioning faith in the rules and motives of conduct, instilled into them. But the times are changed; there has been so much disillusion in every province of thought and action, and with the diffusion of knowledge, which we owe to a more complete education and a more accessible literature, men have grown more reflective and self-conscious, more

determined to consciously control their destinies, instead of floating idly on the current of traditional usages. As an immediate consequence, men came to recognise that their religious professions and practices, in strange contrast to all other opinions and actions, had little or no explicit motive in consciousness. Man prided himself on being rational, yet here was a large province of opinions which he accepted (through a confused notion of faith which will not bear rational analysis) without the mental conviction of their truth which he demanded in every other province. Thus the discussion of religious apologetics became popular, and was heard as frequently in the workshop as in the academy. The simple arguments at first given by their religious guides were found inadequate to meet the criticism that permeated even the lower strata of the literary atmosphere; moreover, religious teachers were discovered to be grossly ignorant of the changed aspects of the problem, and foolishly eager to seal the mind of their flock against it by coercion and by calumny. But men found it difficult to make an act of faith in teachers whose own knowledge they could not gauge, and against whom were arrayed some of the deepest and sincerest thinkers of the age—men whose minds were trained in the school of mathematics and physical science, and who were the first masters of our most recent knowledge. A man was born into a world that seethed with religious controversy; scores of conflicting sects claimed his exclusive allegiance, deafening the ear with their mutual anathemas, and the religious problem had become a veritable labyrinth, repulsive to enter.

It is not surprising, then, that thousands in every land are quietly abandoning all hope of finding peace and permanence in any religious establishment, and are devoting themselves to more solid and tangible work in moral and social science—the sciences that deal with those aspects of human life which do unquestionably demand our regulation. Numbers are still struggling in the field of conflict, giving expression, in the melancholy note that marks contemporary fiction and poetry, to the pain and weariness of the barren discussion. Nothing is more persistently depicted in literature than the wrestling of a strong soul with a vanishing belief; nothing, we may infer, touches

more deeply the great heart of humanity that loves to see itself reflected in literature. However, the purpose of the following pages is not so much to survey and summarise the results of modern thought in its bearings upon the religious question as to trace out the progress of an individual mind in its long search after truth on religious matters. The story is familiar enough nowadays, but it seems not unwelcome at any time, and in the writer's case it would appear to be attended by circumstances that lend it a peculiar interest. It is the history of a mind that has traversed painfully the whole field of religious controversy, having moved from the most dogmatic of existing sects to a purely negative or agnostic attitude; of one, moreover, who has been placed in a particularly advantageous position for surveying the field of controversy, and whose only ambition it was, for years, to become an apologist for the creed he has been forced to abandon. And the change has been wrought, strange to say, almost exclusively from the study of religious evidences in themselves, without the aid of antagonistic writers, whose works are jealously excluded under the narrow-minded despotism of the Church of Rome. A few autobiographical details will perhaps make the position clearer.

The shades of doubt fell upon my mind at the early age of sixteen. Living under the shadow of the Franciscan church at Manchester, I had taken the resolution of becoming a member of the Order of St. Francis, and had just adopted the costume of that fraternity. The quiet atmosphere of the cloister, at least that portion of it which novices breathe, had exerted its peculiar influence over me, flooding my being with visions of another world, making the ascetic life of Francis of Assisi, of Paul, and of Christ seem the very perfection of wisdom. But high structures need deep and sure foundations, and soon I became painfully conscious that I was sacrificing this real world, throbbing with life and hope, for a world that seemed but a vision floating in my imagination. Of philosophy I knew nothing, nor did I then clearly see the import of the conflicting feelings that were already beginning to darken my life—the thrilling joy and hope, and the chill, dreary scepticism that alternately nerved and depressed me. On consultation with my novice-master, I was told to trust the

guidance of the great minds who had defended religion in all ages, to crush every thought and sedulously avoid everything that could endanger my belief. It was poor consolation, yet I resolved to act upon it until my philosophical studies commenced. These I entered upon a few years later with feverish eagerness, but they ended in deep disappointment at the empty, hollow-sounding verbiage that is offered as proof of the most vital theses. Silently and devotedly I continued my task, wandering throughout the whole range of apologetic literature in search of living thoughts that could help me to retain my belief in God and a future life. I had the advantage at that time, during seven years, of the guidance of a man who was considered one of the ablest for the purpose (now consultor to the Order), and week after week I opened my mind's inmost Holy Office at Rome as General of the whole Franciscan recesses to receive his advice and direction. But, as my age and studies advanced, he ceased to be of any assistance to me: his words were a repetition of the old, threadbare phrases, assertions without proof, misrepresentations of science, of history, and of adverse theories.

This threw me almost entirely upon my own efforts, for it is painful to think how little deep reflection on fundamental religious questions, how deplorable an ignorance of the most important points of faith, one finds on an intimate acquaintance with the clergy. Lay people scarcely realise this, since they have only the prepared discourses of the clergy to infer from; but those who have been behind the scenes of sanctuary work know how laborious a task it is for the vast majority of preachers to prepare a discourse on these points that are so widely and so eagerly discussed. However, I seemed at length to find sufficient evidence to justify me in continuing the life I had adopted, and in aspiring to the position of preacher and teacher of religion. Ever and anon the clouds would gather, racking me with pain and anxiety, and causing an almost chronic sadness that was remarked in me; but, on the whole, I considered my position sound, and thought the difficulties were due rather to defect of temperament than to the inherent weakness of my opinions. After five years' study at London I was ordained priest and appointed to the chair of philosophy, thus obtaining ample opportunity to prosecute

my studies. One year I went to Louvain University, where I followed a course of fundamental philosophy under one of the most distinguished living exponents of scholastic philosophy, and an introductory course to Biblical Criticism under an equally distinguished professor. Time wore on, and there was ever the same alternation of peace and storm, as light and darkness flitted alternately over my mind. However, my thoughts were now more systematised, and the issues were gradually narrowing to a point at which it seemed possible to give a final decision.

The whole system of beliefs to which I desired to cling rested logically (considering the system in opposition to all other creeds and theories) upon four cardinal points, and my attention was soon concentrated upon these. The whole controversy between the Church of Rome and other Christian sects turns upon the dogma of Papal Infallibility. Then Christianity has, in face of the numerous and more extensive non-Christian religions, to vindicate its attribution of a divine character, or at least of a divine mission, to its founder; that resolves itself into a vindication of the authenticity and reliability of the Gospels. But the two more fundamental points, over which my greatest troubles had arisen, were the existence of God and the spirituality of the human soul. I am aware that the spirituality of the soul may not be regarded as an essential point of rational theology—we may accept it from revelation, which does not necessarily presuppose it. Still, it is for most men a doctrine to be substantiated by human reason, and in point of fact the Church of Rome authoritatively declares it to lie within the province of pure philosophy. If we cannot rebut the materialistic conception of man, a positive revelation has little chance of acceptance.

These are the main points that absorbed my attention for years, and I intend to treat them *seriatim*, pointing out the successive positions my mind took up with regard to them, and how I came finally to reject them after a conscientious consideration of all that has been written in their defence.

#### GOD.

From the earliest ages thinkers have devoted themselves to the task of providing a rational basis for that belief in a



Supreme Being which, in more or less attenuated form, history shows to be nearly co-extensive in time and space with human intelligence. The majority of men, little addicted to introspection, can give no reason, or only mutter a few superficial and crudely assimilated phrases, when asked for the motive of this, their fundamental belief. A theologian would say that God has provided a mysterious power, called faith, that links securely the minds of the unthinking majority to their belief. A more matter-of-fact observer would see either that they never reflect on the fact that they take this traditional doctrine with little or no proof; or that, from an instinctive feeling of the difficulty of the problem, they readily acquiesce in the most superficial arguments; or, from a confusion of the provinces of faith and reason, they consider it unlawful to indulge in speculation on the problem at all. But the more reflective, and their number is legion now, know that faith—the acceptance of a doctrine on divine authority—necessarily presupposes a knowledge of God, acquired and verifiable by rational methods. Hence it is that from the very dawn of philosophy, from the earliest days when the human mind became capable of taking a larger and more penetrating survey of its environment, it has been actively engaged in constructing a bridge from the visible world to its supposed invisible Maker. We have now before us, in every form, from the ponderous tome of the mediæval theologian to the penny tract, a curious and extensive collection of arguments for the existence of God—as strange and conflicting a group as the forms which that higher power has successfully assumed in the changeful consciousness of men.

There is a point in this numerical multiplication of arguments. We are asked to take them as so many converging lines of inquiry, so that, even if individually they seem unable to bear a strict logical analysis, a strong probability arises from the mere fact of their convergence towards a common centre. This is the argument of Cardinal Newman's famous *Grammar of Assent*. But there is little value in such a contention; we are only too familiar, from the history of science and philosophy, with the facility with which arguments can be accumulated for a position which it is thought desirable to maintain. And then we must remember the mutual antagonism of the advocates of these

various branches of inquiry. The arguments of Socrates and Plato were thrust aside by Aristotle to give way to his own more solid structure of proof. The Alexandrians and Augustine shelved Aristotle, and restored Plato to honour. The Arabs of the twelfth, and the Schoolmen of the thirteenth, century rehabilitated Aristotle's proofs; now, both they and Aristotle having once more fallen into disrepute, their methods are pronounced useless, and despairing efforts are made to find a new foundation for the tottering structure. Everywhere are conflict and dissension. Newman anathematizes us for not admitting the existence of God, pointing out with Kant that conscience is the only valid basis of proof, and that metaphysical argument is valueless; the majority of his learned *confrères* condemn his method, and anathematize us for not trusting *their* metaphysical disquisitions. There is unanimity on one point—that the existence of God is clear, and cannot honestly be denied; but we need hardly go beyond the pages of religious writers for a refutation of the innumerable proofs which are supposed to point to it.

However, certain arguments, which still have a wide acceptance, call for a sincere and protracted examination, and among them the argument from the phenomena of conscience holds a conspicuous place in our days. One is strongly tempted to regard it as an escape from the scepticism which centuries of discussion have naturally engendered, for only in these latter days has the discovery been made that conscience furnishes a valuable proof of the existence of God. There is a terrible irony, not wholly unfounded perhaps, in the passage of Heine where he describes Kant, after demolishing every other form of proof, reconstructing the Deity from the moral sense, to stem the tears of his aged and superstitious servant.

In the analysis of conscience it is necessary to distinguish the moral sense as such, the perception of the moral character of actions, from the sense of obligation consequent upon the perception. Sometimes the argument rests upon the mere power of discriminating between moral and immoral acts, and it is urged that an idea of this specific character could not be evolved from non-moral ideas; more frequently, however, it is said that we recognise the necessity of a supreme legislator in the sense of obligation to fulfil

the moral law, in the remorse that haunts its transgression, or the approval that smiles upon its fulfilment. Now, taking conscience in the first aspect, it is difficult to find in it anything that transcends ordinary psychological explanation. Take a volume of moral theology as it is elaborated in the Roman Church. First we find an analysis of conscience, which is purely naturalistic, and which is entirely at variance with the popular tendency to make of conscience an isolated, supernatural gift—an echo of the voice of God in man's heart; it is described as human reason pronouncing certain actions to be out of harmony with our rational nature, and prejudicial to the welfare of society. Sin or immorality is analysed in like fashion. An act is forbidden because it is immoral; it is not immoral because God forbids it. To be sinful an action must either be (1) directly opposed to one or other prerogative of the Deity (and these *sins* stand or fall with belief in God), or (2) prejudicial to society, or (3) injurious to our neighbour. The same principle is acted upon throughout the whole complex system of morals, and yet we have Catholic writers, like Dr. Mivart, contending that moral distinctions cannot be explained by evolution; while it is attempted to establish a legislator other than humanity for a moral code which is exclusively concerned with the interests of humanity.

Newman, who declared he would be an Atheist but for the argument from conscience, rests his inference upon the second aspect of conscience—the feeling of constraint and the remorse that follows sin. But surely, if the preceding analysis of the moral law (taken from Roman theology) is correct, it has in itself a sufficient basis and sanction, and our natural impulse to observe it is easily understood. On the one hand, we have the inherited experience of innumerable ancestors and the deeply-impressed associations of our early training pointing out certain lines of conduct as moral; on the other hand, we have the consciousness of our connection with a society from which our life derives half its happiness, the knowledge that each immoral act and habit tends to undermine a state of society which it is our supreme interest to support and develop. A mind withdrawn from the influence of religion feels no more than this; but this covers the whole ground of the moral code, and it is all we have to explain in conscience. We need no

higher legislator to classify our actions, and to impose upon us a sense of obligation to abstain from immorality.

Perhaps the most popular argument is drawn from the beauty and order and apparent purpose in the universe. In spite of the profound modification of the problem which evolution has effected, this remains the most familiar of all the proofs of the existence of God. Catholic philosophers are, indeed, abandoning it as a distinct proof, but preachers (who are rarely thinkers) still linger affectionately over the venerable argument, and poets and novelists with a taste for apologetics are ever putting our materialism to shame by their appeals to the glorious procession of worlds across the darkened stage of the heavens, to the thrilling panorama of earthly scenery, to the monuments of constructive wisdom in the organic worlds. But when we consign rhetoric and sentiment to their legitimate provinces, we soon realise that all we can reasonably hope to discover are the *efficient* causes, not the *final* causes of the universe. It is only by postulating intelligence in the "First Cause" (after postulating the First Cause itself) that we can speak of a purpose or finality in the world-process. For when men speak of the necessity of a "controlling mind," a "designer and ruler," they are only substituting mystery for mystery at the best. How can we conceive matter to act in obedience to a lawgiver? It is easy and impressive to speak of the issue of an omnipotent Fiat, and the obedient movement and development that brought order out of chaos; but remember that obedience is a metaphor taken from the moral world. How can this dull, dead, inert matter we have so much depreciated carry out so faithfully the decree of its maker? How can unconscious atoms realise so sublime a conception?

There is only one conceivable meaning for the expression—namely, that God implanted certain powers in matter, endowed it with certain active properties, through whose slow, inevitable action the universe was formed. If material forces do not suffice, add spiritual agencies; in the ultimate analysis you will have merely discovered that the universe is the product of certain factors, and, as far as this argument is concerned, the factors may have been themselves eternal and uncaused, or they may have been the unconscious evolution of a supreme principle in a Pantheistic

sense. That they were created for the express purpose of realising a definite plan cannot be proved *a posteriori*; we must first learn independently that the First Cause was capable of prevision, if they are proved to have been caused at all. Thus it appears that no specific argument can be drawn from the complexity of organic structures, or from the order and harmony of the inorganic world. After reading Paul Janet's classical work on the subject, *Les Causes Finales*, I came to the conclusion that it was quite useless, apart from the influence of evolution.

I now come to the argument which did support my Theistic beliefs for a considerable period—the metaphysical argument. Uneducated people are frequently heard to remark that they think of God mainly as the maker of the universe; their mind recognises its insufficiency, and postulates a creator to explain its existence. It seemed to me that this position was confirmed on deeper philosophical inquiry, and that thus, even admitting the great world to be the necessary outcome of a primitive nebula, whose condensation sufficiently explained its structure and its contents, still we were bound to recognise a higher principle beyond the nebula—the author of its existence, its properties, its motion and primitive disposition. Thus what was lost in teleology was more than compensated. I could not enthuse with special emphasis over the marvels of the microscope and telescope, for I knew too well the secular process of development that explained them; but the whole world seemed now to testify to a higher power, the grain of sand as eloquently as the starry universe, and I thought I had here a firm basis of Theistic belief which no progress of science would ever disturb. However, I felt I had not yet reached the deepest roots of the argument, and doubt and misgiving periodically took possession of me. When one is engaged in ministerial and professional work in London, it is difficult to find an opportunity for the severe task of honestly and thoroughly examining the bases of belief. In the summer of 1896 the rectorship of a small college in the country was offered to me, which afforded me the necessary leisure and retirement. It was then that I finally abandoned all hope of finding a basis for Theistic belief.

The metaphysical argument, or argument from causality, is frequently formulated in an obviously sophistical manner,

just as the principle of causality itself is often a mere tautology. In its improved form the principle runs, "Whatever begins to exist has a cause," and consequently the non-eternity of the world would have to be proved before the principle could be applied. I was at one time under the impression that the non-eternity of the world could be proved, but I soon came to recognise in the argument an ingenious play upon words, such as are notoriously common in scholastic philosophy. In endeavouring to widen the application of the principle, Leibnitz discovered that it really sprang from a deeper and more universal principle, "There is nothing without a sufficient reason," and this became the basis of the Theistic argument. It is usually formulated in this manner:—The material universe must have a sufficient reason for its existence, and for its possession of its actual powers and properties; either it exists necessarily and essentially, and in that case we find the sufficient reason in its own essence, or it is not self-existent, when we must seek the reason why it actually exists in some productive principle. Now, when we reflect on all our knowledge of matter, it seems clear that it is not self-existent; its existence seems a pure contingency which we can easily change in thought; it might have been eternally in rest, yet it is in motion; its properties might conceivably have been very different. We must, therefore, postulate an eternal, self-existent being, distinct from the world, who gave it existence, and is responsible for its actual movement and distinctive characteristics.

It will surprise many that such an argument should have been considered the strongest foundation of belief in God; yet it is everywhere the principal support of rational theology. The study of metaphysics does, indeed, develop and strengthen the reasoning faculty, but it has the notorious effect of predisposing to a confusion of the subjective and the objective. The metaphysician has ever been inclined to objectify his mental images and their connections; and if I had not indulged largely in the study of historical and physical science, there is every probability that I should have continued to rest my belief in a real, objective, spiritual world, on the subjective play of thought which it represented in the metaphysical argument. It contains just the same fallacy as the popular way of thinking: "The world *must* have a

cause ; there *must* be an infinite being somewhere." The "must" is a psychological phenomenon, and nothing more—a mental impulse or craving is construed into an objective necessity. So it is in the philosophical elaboration of the same thought: self-existence, or necessary existence, and contingency is an antithesis of *thought* transferred illegitimately into attributes of *things*; the principle of sufficient reason is the expression of a law, or, rather, a strong tendency of thought, which has been projected into the real world in the day-dream of the metaphysician.

Thus did I come to the term of my inquiry, and taste the bitter fruit of the tree of knowledge. Other arguments there are without number; sad monuments of the obstinate adherence of humanity to a faltering belief. One by one they dissolved upon a severe and impartial analysis, as I lingered over the yellow pages of the heroes of the school, or devoured each new apologist who seemed so profoundly convinced of the depth and originality of his evidences. Like the famous character in Heine, I called piteously upon God, wandering in thought throughout the universe; but the environing space and the mountain sides, the restless sea and the busy haunts of men, did but re-echo the despairing cry. And yet in bitter irony the Church of Rome was teaching, with characteristic feeling, that the existence of God was so evident that it could not honestly be called into question. Its theologians spend half their time in destroying each other's arguments; its priests are, to an alarming extent, utterly unable to render a reason for the faith that is in them; but its unity must be preserved; and so the world is described as a mirror reflecting so brightly a divine power and wisdom that a man must deliberately close his eyes not to confess them. Its fires have been extinguished; but persecution is still the weapon with which it wards off the "wolves" from its flock. It may be said that the impossibility of honest agnosticism is not an article of faith defined by the Church of Rome, but it is practically equivalent to one; it is a point on which there is a clear consensus of its theologians, and its manuals of theology emphatically promulgate it. The heretic may be piously trusted to be in good faith, but the Agnostic bears the mark of reprobation on his brow, more surely than the painted face under the street-lamp.

## THE SOUL.

The expectation of a positive revelation, which prepares the way to a large extent for its reception on indifferent evidence, is based upon two fundamental propositions of natural religion—the existence of God and the spirituality and immortality of the soul. Once the material world comes to be regarded as a translucent veil that hangs for a time between a personal God and a human spirit vaguely conscious of a high destiny, the search for some positive message from behind the veil is natural and hopeful. If, however, these beliefs are themselves found to have little or no rational justification, the study of positive religions no longer presents itself as a matter of such vital importance and of so promising an issue. Consequently, the ingenuity of the religious philosopher has exerted itself in every age in accumulating motives for clinging to this world-wide belief. But if in the preceding case the arguments for the traditional belief have undergone many changes in the progress of thought, the same may be said with much more obvious truth in the present instance. The motives found in the eloquent pages of Plato appeal to few minds of our generation; the arguments of Aristotle and his scholastic commentators are discarded even by most of their own modern followers. New arguments of the most approved and invulnerable type have been invented to meet the critical mind of this rapidly maturing race, and even science—the phantom that has scared so many religious souls during the present century—has been pressed into the service of spiritualist philosophers.

But, if there is one point on which science has shaken the confidence of men in traditional teaching, it is on this question of the possession by man of an immaterial soul. Metaphysics is, from the nature of the case, the ultimate court of appeal in such a question; the crude assertion that scientists reject the soul because the microscope, the skiograph, or the scalpel has never revealed it, is one of the choice expressions invented by theologians, who never read scientists, for the satisfaction of their people, whom they will not allow to read them. Neither literally nor metaphorically is it a correct statement of the case. The truth is that there are two forces at work in modern physical science,



which proceed satisfactorily until we come to human psychology, and which the scientist is naturally loth to relinquish at this point until the gravest possible reasons are shown for respecting the immunity claimed for it. On the one hand we have the law of unity or parsimony, the tendency to restrict as far as possible the number of ultimate factors of the universe; this is a natural protest of a sounder scientific spirit against the reckless multiplication of forces and principles of less enlightened ages, when all different sets of phenomena were attributed at once to radically distinct principles, and supposed to be explained. On the other hand, there is the law of evolution—the most brilliant discovery of the nineteenth century—which has shed so marvellous a light on the past history of the world, and which now only encounters serious opposition when it deals with the origin of human intelligence. To show that a mechanical or monistic view of the universe and an acceptance of evolution cannot include man, it is necessary to point to certain of his characteristics, which reveal the presence in him of a new and specifically distinct principle. Until that is done the claims which evolution and mechanism derive from their already universal application cannot be set aside. Difficulties in their application there will be; but difficulties, as theologians so loudly protest in other matters, are not objections.

The philosophy which I taught was, of course, essentially dualistic: it takes a middle course between Materialism and Berkeleian Idealism. Moreover, it teaches that the human soul is not an isolated spirit, as in Plato's and Descartes' teaching, in absolute contrast to the rest of the universe; the immaterial world is interwoven much more intimately with the material. The problem, therefore, on which my mind was exercised, and in the solution of which I came to my present attitude, was to establish clearly the frontiers of the immaterial world, where we could confidently face the rising tide of scientific naturalism, and say: "Here shall the proud waves break." For I thought there was no sadder sight in the history of the century than the retreat of our apologists from the untenable positions they successively occupied. Not only was this the case in Scripture and history, but it was conspicuously true in those provinces of philosophy which they once peopled with

immaterial principles. Whatever may be said of conservatism as an abstract principle, its exemplification in the history of the Church of Rome, from its encounter with Galileo onwards, is not encouraging. It is well to rest under the shadow of the authority of Aristotle and the leading Schoolmen; but we must remember that in questions which lie on the borderland between physics and metaphysics it was difficult to give a decision at a time when the development of the two sciences was so disproportionate. And the problem of vitality, about which philosophical tradition and the scientific revolution came into conflict, belongs to that neutral territory. The duty of the biologist is to extend his explanations as far as they are capable, and the metaphysician may discuss the residuum, if there be any.

It was held formerly, and is still held by many Catholic philosophers who adhere to the orthodox practice of disregarding contemporary activity, that the immaterial world first reveals its presence in plants. There is, unfortunately, much confusion in defining the terms "immaterial," "spiritual," etc.; but for my purpose it is sufficient to say that they held (and hold) that the phenomena of plant-life (growth, nutrition, etc.) cannot be explained by the properties of the matter of which the plant is composed; that, consequently, they reveal the working of some principle in the plant which is not matter. From this point Immaterialists began to beat a retreat early in the nineteenth century; curious survivals of it are still met with—*e.g.*, in Lepidi, a modern Catholic philosopher of some reputation. It would be idle to discuss the controversy; but the moral of the retreat is a serious one.

Plants were credited with an immaterial principle—a "soul," as they did not hesitate to call it—because their properties were very different from those of ordinary matter; the possibility of material forces producing widely different results when they enter into certain highly complex combinations came to be recognised as vegetable physiology and chemistry progressed. The principle of the argument was unsound; ammonia has properties remarkably different from those of hydrogen and nitrogen, yet none will say (except a few Catholic philosophers) that a new principle must be introduced to explain the new properties, when

hydrogen and nitrogen unite, and ammonia is formed. So also from the different properties of the plant, its vital activities, it was evidently illogical to demand the admission of an immaterial source for them.

Now, the difficulty is that the argument for an immaterial principle in the "lower" animals is precisely of the same character. The vital forces in animals are very *different* from ordinary material forces; hence it is inferred that they are not material forces—they are the manifestation of an immaterial principle. But mere *difference* of properties does not suffice, as is proved from the earlier controversy. What degree of difference is necessary before we are logically justified in introducing a new principle? In the former case the philosopher's inference was merely founded upon the temporary imperfection of physical science. Now, biological science is making rapid progress; how do you know it will not undermine your position here also? Can any definite criterion of the immaterial be posited, or must we retreat step by step as the biologist advances, at each step betraying the weakness of our logic? Remember that the last step is the spirituality of the human soul.

For many years it seemed to me that such a criterion was available. The properties of mind are very different from those of matter. If we are logical, and if we remember a little controversial history, we shall not infer forthwith that mind must be the manifestation of spirit, not an outgrowth of matter. But if we can show that the properties of mind are not merely *different*, but *contradictory*, entirely opposed to those of matter, we may defy the progress of the Materialist. No addition of nonentities will produce a being (except in the brain of a Hegel), no multiplication of ciphers will give a number. Now, consciousness itself is not a phenomenon of this character. There is, indeed, a vast gulf between the movements of the molecules of the brain and the states of consciousness which accompany them; but we have no satisfactory reason for asserting that the gulf will never be traversed. No Theist will deny that matter could have been endowed with consciousness, like Leibnitz's monads, if the Creator so willed—in point of fact, *unorganised* matter is not; but it is strange to infer that, therefore, *organised* matter cannot be the subject of consciousness. When the new science of psycho-physics has pursued its

investigations into the relation between cerebral changes and states of consciousness for a considerable time, and when the comparative anatomy of the nervous system has made equal progress, perhaps the problem will wear a different aspect. However that may be, it is not proved that consciousness may not have arisen from an improved nervous structure; and, until that is done, it is unlawful to introduce a new, immaterial element into animal nature. The history of the past and the elementary rules of logic forbid it.

As we ascend the scale of the animal kingdom, mere consciousness, irritability, takes the form of definite perception of external objects. We are justified (in spite of Cartesians) in attributing sensitive perceptions like our own to the higher classes of animals at least. Now, it appeared to me that sensation was the rock which would mark the limit of progress and Materialism. It mattered little whether we could say precisely where definite sensitive perception began or not; wherever it began, we had the impassable frontier of the immaterial world. There seemed to be an indivisibility in the perceptive principle which clearly precluded the possibility of its being material, for matter is as clearly compound and divisible. We perceive an object whole and entire at a glance; something within us must unify the various parts of the object, and perceive them simultaneously. If the brain is a sensitised plate on which the impression of the object is made, each atom contained in the cellule, or group of cellules, over which the impression is spread, would have its share of the impression; but must there not be some simple, indivisible principle pervading the brain substantially united to it to explain the synthesis of these partial perceptions? Two objects are united in a judgment, and simultaneously perceived; the act of reasoning is still more complex. In fine, there is a supreme unity of the whole psychic life apparently pointing to the absolute unity and simplicity of its substratum, whereas the nervous system becomes increasingly complex.

That is the argument which finds most favour with scientifically-minded spiritualists. However, my professor at Louvain and several of the most distinguished Catholic philosophers rejected it, and through their criticism I came

to see its weakness—its confusion of *undividedness* and *indivisibility*. A suggestion of Professor Huxley had always troubled me—the brain might not actually be a congeries of separate atoms. It is possible that Sir W. Thompson's theory of atoms—that they are merely vortices in a continuous medium—may be correct; if so, the basis of the argument is destroyed. In any case, granting that consciousness may possibly be an efflorescence of nerve-tissue, there seemed no great difficulty, when the nervous system is thoroughly studied, in ascribing the unity of conscious life to the unity of the nervous system.

Thus my criterion proved faulty, and I am unable to find any other grave reason for thinking that a spiritual and imperishable substance underlies our mental life. The apparent freedom of the will dissolves upon a careful study of the relation of motive to voluntary action. The power of reflection, from which springs the artistic faculty, does not present serious difficulty when we are dealing with a highly developed nervous system, once the initial difficulty of consciousness is overcome. Much emphasis is often laid upon the fact that we are at all able to think about things spiritual; it is implied that matter, however elaborated, could not rise to such a level. But our ideas of the spiritual world, like our ideas of the infinite, are negative only in so far as they represent the immaterial: we abstract material characters and limitations from our ideas of objects, and they are spiritualised. And this power of abstraction, like the power of fusion or generalisation, no more postulates the spirituality of the principle of thought than does the power of reflection.

Another argument that has become very popular is taken from the permanence or identity of consciousness at successive periods of life: it is here that science is supposed to give reluctant evidence in favour of the spiritualist philosophy. Science shows that within a comparatively brief period the entire matter of the organism is renewed; whence, then, triumphantly cries the psychologist, the identity of personal consciousness and the permanence of memory throughout so many transformations? I remember vividly a scene of twenty years ago; every particle of the matter of my brain has been renewed since then: what has remained and retained the impression? The structure of the brain has

remained; and, whatever be the obscurity of the physical basis of memory, it is certain that it depends upon changes made in the structure of cellules, in a definite arrangement of their parts. And in the renewal of the matter of the brain the minutest structures are undisturbed—atom replaces atom with perfect fidelity. In the fossilisation of an animal, when the tissues are replaced by new matter, the most delicate structures are preserved: if a phonogram were fossilised, the new matter would reproduce the original air as faithfully as the renewed brain reproduces the impressions of the past.

If there is no satisfactory evidence of the spirituality of the soul, the question of its immortality is superfluous. To entertain the thought seriously, we must admit in man an incorruptible substance, capable of thought and volition, without the co-operation or instrumentality of a brain. I do not for a moment consider that thought and volition are, as yet, satisfactorily explained as cerebral functions; no one can expect it of a science still in its infancy. But I see no proof that thought and volition have any intrinsic character evidently demanding a spiritual agency. All that is offered in the way of proof amounts to the assertion that they are at present very clearly and sharply marked off from all other forces. Science has bridged over many such gulfs in the past, and its constructive power is intensifying every year. Moreover, it is easy to see the vast progress that has been made in that direction during the last half-century. The investigations of the psycho-physicist, of the pathologist, and of the criminologist point exclusively in the direction of Materialism. The evolution of the nervous system in the human individual and in the animal kingdom has a significance that points in the same direction. When Germany became sick of metaphysics, and commenced its laborious and brilliant career of physical science, it is remarkable how quickly its Idealism and Spiritualism were replaced by a universal Materialism. In every country the number of brilliant, conscientious thinkers who have rejected traditional belief, largely through the influence of physical science, is well known and deeply significant. Clearly the spirituality of the soul has not been too generously revealed to those who would most have benefited by its consoling promise.

## CHRIST.

There are many who now look to the figure of Christ for the restoration of that faith in the spiritual world which modern Scepticism seems determined to undermine. In the world at large we read only naturalism ; the spirit-world is so completely veiled from our sight that we lose even our own spiritual identity. Humanity once saw on the outspread world a reflection of its Creator's attributes, dim and troubled as on the ruffled surface of a lake ; even that has passed away, and wearily it takes its life as part of the visible whole, unvisited by faintest gleam of a brighter world. But we are told that a revelation has been given more in proportion to our materialised ways of thinking ; the figure of Christ, appearing as the central point of the world's history, is a striking embodiment of the higher power that encircles our life, intended to raise us from the naturalism to which we are ever succumbing by a revelation of supernatural wisdom, goodness, and power.

In the first place, it is urged that the very triumph of Christ, as it is written luminously on the history of the world, compels us to attribute to him a superhuman character. For three years he traversed Judea, a fervent and eloquent, but poor and untutored, preacher ; his life seemed to end in utter failure and ignominy. But, before the end of the first century, the sect that bore his name was rapidly spreading over the Empire ; every conceivable form of persecution was tried in vain to eradicate it ; and, when its adherents were at length free to come forth into the light of day, it soon became coterminous with the Roman Empire. And through 2,000 years it has retained its supremacy over Europe—through the rise and fall and redistribution of empires, through the moral corruption that repeatedly crept over the land, through the intellectual movements that successive eras of peace have developed ; so that to-day 300 millions of the most civilised races of the earth bend their knees in adoration before the crucified figure of the Galilean.

For many this brilliant triumph, enlarged upon unceasingly by the ecclesiastical rhetorician, is proof enough of the divinity of Christ's mission ; they feel comparatively unconcerned at the fate of certain documents which

purport to give a description of the still more wonderful life of this leader. Whatever may be thought of the doctrine of the Incarnation, we catch a glimpse of the divine in this marvellous page of history: a divine influence must have pervaded the world to win and preserve such a veneration. Now, such a thought is intelligible at a period when history was not a science, but a descriptive catalogue of events, and when Europe, with the sublime egoism of Judea or ancient Greece, looked down upon the rest of the human race as "barbarians" in moral and intellectual matters. But there is more power of analysis in modern history, and its vision is infinitely wider, so that it is not surprising if inferences, drawn by a more superficial science, are rejected by its more cautious and reflective successor. The growth of Christianity has formed the study of some of our ablest and deepest historians, and their suggestions, founded upon an accurate and extensive knowledge of their science, throw sufficient light upon the phenomenon to prevent us from indulging in the hypothesis of a supernatural influence. Unfortunately, here again eagerness to retain traditional ideas, and the mere spirit of controversy, stand in the way of a calm and judicious discussion of the question. Take Newman's examination of Gibbon's celebrated analysis of the growth of Christianity: it is a striking example of a hasty and insufficient study of an opponent's position for the purpose of refutation. From the knowledge we now have of the religious condition of the Roman Empire, it is not difficult to understand the transition from Paganism to Christianity of large numbers of its members, even in the face of persecution; that the majority of its members, with their purely external attachment to Paganism, should have become Christians when they saw the change at the imperial court and the power of its priesthood broken, is still less supernatural.

Then, again, with the enlargement of our historical range of vision we have the advantage of comparison with the growth of other religions. The proverb that history repeats itself is conspicuously true in the rise of religions. The whole story of Christianity had been enacted in the Far East centuries before Christ was born. The life of Buddha was as noble as that of Christ, and his moral teaching equally elevated; the same mythical features had been added to it



by his zealous followers. Buddhism has had more vicissitudes, and has, at the present day, more adherents, than Christianity; we have far less historical data to assist us in analysing its growth than we have in the case of Christianity, yet we feel no apprehension that, in attributing it to natural causes, we may be neglecting some revelation of a higher power. To the impartial historian, whose views are subsequent, not antecedent, to his knowledge, Christianity is but one member of a large family of religions—Confucianism, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Mohammedanism, etc.; its birth and life are similar to theirs; its death will be like theirs: like man himself, it bears no peculiar marks to prove the supernatural origin and the immortality claimed for it.

Thus, if it is true that the documents which describe the life of Christ are no longer worthy of implicit credence, we have no serious reason for thinking that Christ will lead us to a superhuman and supernatural life rather than Buddha or Zoroaster. The historical question is, then, the fundamental one. Have we an authentic description of his actions in the Gospel, and must we recognise a superhuman agency in them? This was always the one point of controversy, to my mind; moral arguments, such as the preceding, never seem to me sufficiently strong to bear such a construction. And when we come to examine the documents which constitute the "New Testament," we notice at once that the traditional view of their character has undergone the same modifications as we have seen in other beliefs. From the words of the writers of the early Church, it is clear that verbal inspiration was the common opinion, nor do we find much modification until we come to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. From that period the extraordinary activity of critical analysis has worked a complete revolution in the educated world with regard to the Bible, and the New Testament has not been spared. Outside the Church of Rome inspiration has been virtually abandoned, and even in that heroically conservative institution the term has been emptied of all meaning. There is no dogmatic definition of inspiration, and the words in which the Councils incidentally describe it are of that elastic and diplomatic character which the Church always uses when, with an eye to future developments, it

wishes to impress the uneducated majority without restricting too narrowly the liberty of the educated minority. One eminent professor of Scripture used to tell me that he prayed for a dogmatic definition of inspiration from Rome; another hoped that the Pope would not be so foolish as to lay down anything dogmatically at the present day. Ordinary Catholics are consoled by the Pope's encyclicals; but Leo XIII. will die like Honorius or John XXII.; his utterances can conveniently be laid aside as not *ex-cathedra* pronouncements whenever it becomes clearly necessary to do so; even now they only bind the expressions, not the thoughts, of Catholics.

However, the hopeless controversy about inspiration is of little consequence; the question is, Do the documents form an authentic and reliable narrative of the words and life of Christ? The answer must be obtained by the impartial use of ordinary critical methods—by the examination of the evidence produced in favour of the truthfulness of the New Testament. Evidence may be either internal, taken from certain features of the narrative itself, or external—that is, the testimony of other reliable documents to its authenticity. It matters little whether we can trace the Gospels to Matthew, Mark, etc.; if they are proved to be records of events by contemporary and credible witnesses, they are worthy of credence. But that is precisely what we *cannot* prove them to be; the evidence adduced is hopelessly insufficient. There is internal evidence of some force found in the topography, the political allusions, and the numismatics of the Gospels; but that is useless, since it does not extend to the only passages we are concerned about—the words of Christ and his supposed miracles. These may have been inserted into a simple and truthful contemporary biography of Christ, or an earlier document may have been used to give colouring and plausibility to a much later composition. We should have some basis for trust in the Gospel story if we had reliable assurance from known writers that it existed, as we now have it, immediately after the time of Christ, and that it had emanated from Jewish eye-witnesses of the events; but nothing could be farther from the actual case. It is not until the middle of the second century that we have any testimony in favour of the authenticity of the Gospels worth considering. To

quote Clement, Ignatius, and Polycarp as witnesses to the authenticity of the Gospels is absurd; at the most, their words only show that certain documents existed which subsequently appear in the text of the Gospels. Justin is the earliest writer from whom we can gather anything about the Gospels of a really useful character. He lived more than a century after the death of Christ.

This, therefore, is the true position of the question. Towards the middle of the second century A.D. certain documents are found to be in circulation professing to describe the life of a religious teacher who had lived in a remote part of the Empire more than 100 years before. These documents, or gospels, are many in number, and all of unknown authorship; they are in the possession of an obscure and fanatical sect, and many of them contain obvious absurdities. Gradually the more absurd are denounced as apocryphal, and four are retained, which, together with some letters of one of the early Christians, form the "New Testament" of future ages. Could anything be more credulous than to put faith in such a biography, especially when we see how every great religious teacher has been credited with supernatural powers by his followers in the course of a century or two after his death? The utmost we are justified in thinking of Christ is that he was a man of noble and generous life, with a singular influence over his fellow-men, which was counteracted by the intrigues of the priestcraft he so frequently denounced, and which ultimately brought about his death. In this character he will remain one of the heroes of humanity until the end of time; but more than this it is unreasonable, amid the silence of contemporary writers, to demand for him. The crucifix will ever be a symbol for the veneration of humanity; not that it will cast its dark shadow over the world to chill and mortify the lives of men, but it will be a type, like Socrates' poison-cup, of moral heroism, of unyielding fidelity to truth, of victorious opposition to hypocrisy and tyranny.

#### CONCLUSION.

It seems idle to discuss the question of the Papacy after arriving at negative conclusions on the three preceding points; yet the title would hardly be exhausted without

some reference to my change of views on that institution. The removal of disabilities and the Oxford Movement have brought the Church of Rome into prominence in this country once more ; in fact, it was only the insular prejudices of Englishmen that closed their eyes to it for many years as by far the most powerful Christian body in the world. Now we hear on every side of the prospects of the re-union or (in less diplomatic circles) conversion of England to the Church of Rome. I have heard a bishop naïvely deprecating the question of the Disestablishment of the Church of England on the ground that Catholic churches would be inundated with a flood of converts, and its ministry would be quite unable to cope with the extraordinary labours imposed upon them. Catholic papers are continually parading the most recent "converts," the construction of churches, the large ordinations of priests. But those of the inner circle know that it is an open question whether the Church of Rome has made any progress during the last twenty years ; her losses are enormous. Some few years ago a census was taken of the Catholic population of London ; the result was whispered among the clergy—there were between 70,000 and 80,000 nominal Catholics in London alone who had practically abandoned the Church—but it was carefully added : "The cardinal does not want this to get into print." The papers only published the number of chapels erected and the multiplication of those fragrant centres of holiness—convents and monasteries. We find the same condition when we examine what are called triumphantly Roman Catholic countries, of some of which I have had intimate experience, and of others carefully-acquired knowledge. The numbers given in statistical tables are misleading in the extreme ; they include nominal Catholics, of whom millions in France and Belgium alone are, throughout life, outside the pale of the Church.

However, numerical extension or decrease does not affect whatever truth there may be in an institution. The Church of Rome has recovered, sometimes with startling rapidity, from the gravest possible crises ; and an impartial truth-seeker must not be misled by the indifference of its members, or the degeneration of its clergy and religious orders. The Papacy is a living power, perhaps the greatest on earth, commanding the absolute obedience of 200 millions, and

having a large influence beyond its own frontiers. It claims to have a divine origin, and to be entrusted with divine powers for the guidance of humanity. Now, in examining the pretensions of the Papacy to a divine institution, we are met at once by the difficulty mentioned in the preceding section. We really have no trustworthy records of the words of Christ. The authorities of the Church do not claim impeccability, and we know that the Church was certainly not immaculate even in its primitive state: what could be easier than that an ambitious Church should have altered documents to suit its purpose during the hundred years between the death of Christ and their appearance as the canonical Gospels? Remember that the primitive documents of other religions must have been interpolated in this manner, from the Christian point of view.

Still, even if we accept the actual Gospels as faithfully recording the words of Christ, a more glaring contrast between the simplicity of Christ's words and actions and the proud, ambitious Papal Court that is supposed to have grown from them can scarcely be imagined. Every religious teacher, every leader of men, has his favourites or his more active officers; and from the few simple words of Christ, which seem to indicate some such capacity in Peter, the most ardent, but most dangerous, of his disciples, we are asked to infer the foundation of a vast system that would have aroused the indignation of the Galilean carpenter a thousand times more than the Jewish priesthood did. One of the most curious aspects of the history of every religion possessed of sacred documents is the marvellous discoveries that are continually being made of hidden senses of the text. Those who reject the Papacy have a still greater difficulty in finding bishops and archbishops in the text of the Gospel; the Presbyterian does violence to the text for his own purposes; even the pure Evangelical is ever finding deeper meanings, and constructing dogmas or systems on one or other text of the Gospel. But Roman theology is a masterpiece of ingenuity in exegetics. From Christ's simple words, "Whose sins you shall retain they are retained," the whole system of the Confessional is evolved; from a medicinal remark of James comes the curious dogma of Extreme Unction; from some strong language of the sorely-tormented Paul are pressed Original Sin and Baptismal

Regeneration ; from the farewell supper of Christ the extraordinary doctrines of the Eucharist and the Mass, with all their complicated ceremonies ; and the Immaculate Conception is proved from a stray remark in the Genesis version of an old Babylonian legend. Scripture must not be taken alone, they tell us ; tradition embodies revelation with equal authority. But what is tradition ? From the heterogeneous contents of the writings of the Fathers what are we to choose as revealed ? Well, the Pope is infallible ; but it turns out that even he has no inner revelation or positive assistance in the matter ; he must be convinced from Scripture and tradition like ourselves, and it is extremely difficult sometimes to see the connection between his dogmatic conclusions and the scriptural data he alleges for them.

If it is hopeless to trace the origin of the hierarchy of the Church of Rome in Scripture, it is certainly not difficult to understand it as a purely human institution. Follow its growth in ecclesiastical history ; it is as natural as the growth of any civil government. The extension of the Church and the growing exercise of reason on its tenets developed the already separated caste of priesthood into a powerful administrative and magisterial body. Its history is marked throughout by human passion—ambition, intrigue, usurpation, and even coarser vices. Pope after pope has assumed the tiara from mere ambition, and has led, in the midst of a corrupt court, a life that was the very antithesis to that of Christ. It has ever been grasping for power, using it cruelly when obtained, until men were driven to repel it, and then, with open obsequiousness but secret diplomacy, planning to regain it. It aims at the disestablishment of other Churches ; it is bound to hold that itself, the true Church, must be established. It seeks to be thought tolerant ; it quietly teaches doctrines that condemn, without examination, the moral lives of large bodies of earnest men, some of them the most eminent in every land. It justifies the Inquisition and its former persecutions on principles to which it still adheres, and which it would be bound to put in practice again if ever it became powerful enough. Its clergy are notoriously out of the current of modern thought ; yet it terrifies its members into submission, and silences their criticism by the Index and the powerful machinery of pulpit and confessional that bears it out. It fosters religious

orders in which there is only a glow of religious life about once in two centuries; their ordinary characteristics are ignorance, idleness, and unceasing strife. Its gorgeous ceremonies have little more spirit in them than a spectacle at Olympia; it neglects the poor in thousands; its offices are an endless source of mischief (for the *Life of Manning* reveals no unusual proceedings); its clergy and bishops are ignorant, its apologists repeatedly guilty of misrepresentations, its laymen restricted in their literature, and even in their civil and political life.

In my progress from Rome to Rationalism many other considerations have influenced me; but I can do no more than mention two or three of them. Most of the priests who have preceded me in detaching themselves from the Church of Rome within the last few years have been powerfully affected by the history of Biblical Criticism, and the same line of inquiry has had much weight with me. It is impossible to be unmoved at the conduct of Catholic apologists yielding inch by inch to the advance of Higher Criticism, and then, with admirable coolness, adopting the positions they so vigorously denounced. Genesis, upon which pious speculations were so abundant fifty years ago, we must now look upon as an expurgated edition of a book of Babylonian legends of unknown origin, and so on with the rest of the Old Testament; yet even now, after all concessions, the Catholic doctrine, if it means anything at all, certainly as it is interpreted by Leo XIII., is absolutely untenable. It is not necessary at the present day to enumerate errors found in the Bible.

Mysteries likewise in the course of time became intolerable to me. If there were an infinite, any science concerning it would naturally contain mysteries; but many of the dogmas of Christianity are more than mysteries. For a time I was consoled by the philosophical quibbling which is offered to meet doubts about the Trinity, the Incarnation, and the Eucharist; but I came at length to regard them as directly contrary to reason, and, therefore, according to Catholic principles even, to be rejected. Again, the progress of science is undoubtedly eliminating supernaturalism; its torch has illumined the deep abysses of space and the veiled features of the past, and it is every day proclaiming

the self-sufficiency, the self-containedness of the universe, of which man and man's history are but an incidental product. Finally, looking back over the whole scheme of evidences I have criticised, I cannot think that an all-merciful God would have devised such a labyrinth through which men must pass to a knowledge of himself. The problem is hopelessly beyond the majority of men; if they believe, it must be on the authority of their religious guides. And when we remember the gross philosophical ignorance of those guides, and the brilliant galaxy of modern thinkers who stand against them, such an act of faith cannot reasonably be demanded.

I have now explained briefly and simply my mental experiences of the past ten years. I might have stifled my doubts from the commencement; I did not think it honest to do so. With the sword of Damocles overhead, I have pursued my inquiry to the end and avowed my convictions. And for that I stand before the world branded as a criminal by the Church of Rome. My dearest friends have abandoned me as though I were stricken with leprosy, if they did not, indeed, turn upon me with bitter and insulting language; for I was an apostate, and my word availed nothing against my calumniators. And this is an age of light and freedom and Christian charity! May the days soon come in which men will agree to differ on intellectual questions, and unite in social activity; when social ostracism will not be the inevitable consequence of honesty.

*August, 1897.*



M.C.H. Society & Superstition

36.