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CRITICISM TO

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FAITH AND REASON.

1. *The Stand-point of Superstition and Science.*—Shall Reason serve Faith, or shall Faith serve Reason ?

In accordance with these alternatives, men have ranged themselves in two great parties : the one relying on external intellectual authority, the other on individual reason. There have always been men who are satisfied to have their thinking done for them, and there have ever been men who insisted on understanding why they should assent to any belief. The former stand-point may be called that of superstition, the latter that of science.

It would be a great mistake, however, to identify these two stand-points with those of religion and atheism. There are superstitious atheists and there are religious scientists. The stand-point of superstition applies equally to all who owe their intellectual position to anything except personal research and conviction. There are many Christians who belong to a particular Church only because they have never severely questioned its doctrine ; and there are many nominal non-Christians who are such only because they were born or educated in a circle where there was much prejudice against Christianity. There is as much superstition in flippant unbelief, as in unquestioning assent. The stand-point of science applies, on the contrary, to all who owe their intellectual position to personal research and conviction alone. Research may, and often does, justify one's original position, because there is always an immense presumption in favour of the position already held. Yet, research, more or less thorough, may lead the inquiring mind far from its original position. The fact of changing or retaining one's former position, or the fact of occupying either position would not of itself decide whether superstition or science had guided the enquirer.

It is however true that, in respect to religion, the union of Church and State, in pre-Christian as well as Christian times, has always made for the acceptance of the stand-point of superstition, consciously or unconsciously ; for it has identified to a certain extent, in its moral sanctions, the conception of unbelief and criminality. Both offences were avenged by the same punishment, and consequently the same obloquy fell to their lot.

The conception of the separation of Church and State, born with the French Revolution, and adopted in the Constitution

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of the United States, has gained many adherents to the stand-point of science and has destroyed its former moral obloquy. Whereas in former ages the heretic was always accused openly or implicitly of moral offences, the popular mind has come to recognize the perfect compatibility of agnosticism with pure morals. Every chemical experiment made by a school-boy is a reassertion of this stand-point of the sovereignty of individual reason over its beliefs. There is no doubt that the welfare of humanity is inseparably bound up with the universal recognition of freedom of conscience, and the obsolescence of the stand-point of superstition until it be for ever buried in the silent archives of the past.

2. *The Stand-point of Science Advanced to those Outside the Church.*— If it should be asked which of these intellectual stand-points had been occupied by the Christian Church, the answer would be that it has usually employed both, impossible as this would seem at first sight. It has been the custom of the Church to advance the scientific standpoint to those outside her, in order to make converts of them, but to insist rigidly on that of superstition to all who are within her pale.

Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, Arnobius, Lactantius, and Augustine of Hippo, not to mention numberless other less representative apologists, urge strenuously that if the heathen will but let their reason sway their belief, they must necessarily abandon the old faiths, and embrace Christianity. Justin Martyr says: "Reason directs that all who are truly pious and truly philosophers, should love alone that which is true, and refuse to follow the opinions of the ancients, should they prove to be worthless; for sound reason requires that we should not only reject those who act or teach anything contrary to that which is right; but that by every means, and before his own life, the lover of truth ought, even if threatened with death, to choose to speak and to do what is right (1)." Again, "Those who lived according to Reason (Logos) are Christians, even though accounted Atheists. Such among the Greeks were Sokrates and Herakleitos, and those who resembled them; of the Barbarians, Abraham, and Azarias, and Misael and Elias, and many others (2)." Arnobius says, "But ours (the pagan religion) is more ancient,' say you, 'therefore most credible and trustworthy;' as if indeed antiquity were not the most fertile source of errors (3)." Lactantius, with characteristic vehemence, demands, "Will you prefer to follow antiquity or reason (4)?" The patristic evidence is so copious we can but mention it (5), closing with notice of the fact that Gratian's Decretum asserts that the Canonical authority of the Holy Scriptures stands or falls with its inerrancy, so that if the least mistake could be found in it, it would possess no canonical authority whatsoever.

Nevertheless, Christianity advanced this rationalistic stand-point only where it lacked the power to enforce its claims. The earliest apologists asked only for toleration; but as soon

as Christianity possessed the power to do so, it demanded the destruction of its religious opponents. Even so clear-headed a man as Ambrose did not think justice need be observed when dealing with Jews and heretics. When the emperor Theodosius had commanded the Christian bishop of Calliolum in Mesopotamia to restore the Jewish synagogue and Valentinian Church, which monks had without any reason destroyed, Ambrose forced him to rescind his edict on the ground that it was not fitting that money in the hands of Christians should be used for such a purpose. Charlemagne received praise for giving the conquered Saxons the choice of immediate death or baptism. Torquemada was acting with ecclesiastical authority when he forced the heretics to be saved in spite of themselves. Finally, a Pope himself approved of the Massacre of S. Bartholomew, Aug. 24, 1572, at Paris, and caused a medal to be issued in commemoration of the event. Even the Reformers approved of such means of conversions, as the persecutions of Quakers and Episcopalians in New England testify.

3. *The Stand-point of Superstition Advanced to those Within the Church.*—To those who are within her own pale, however, the Christian Church has always advanced the intellectual stand-point of superstition. We are told that at the Council of Nicaea the debate was not on the question which contention—of the Catholics or the Arians—was the true one; the guiding maxim was: “let the ancient customs prevail.” We now begin to hear of the traditions of the “Fathers” handed down from the Apostles, which are to be considered the norms of truth (°). This plea is very deceptive. Historical psychology shows that every man considers his own opinion to agree with that of the wise men of ancient times. Hence the bare fact of being in a majority carries with it the sanction of agreeing with the “Fathers.” Reason is permitted to do its utmost to defend any dogma, but it must never presume to question it. This is the position of Clement of Alexandria, the first Christian since the days of Paul who countenanced philosophy at all. It may be succinctly stated in the following words of Anselm of Canterbury: “As the right order of things requires that we believe the deep things of the Christian faith before we presume to discuss them by reason, so it seems to me to be a sign of negligence if after we have been confirmed in the faith we are not eager to understand what we believe. Wherefore since, by the preventient grace of God, I think that I hold the faith respecting our redemption so firmly that even if I could not comprehend what I believe by any process of reasoning, there is nothing which could tear me away from its firm basis, I beg you to explain to me, etc.” The “preventient grace of God” is merely a metaphor for the fact of having been born and educated amongst orthodox Christians, a ground of belief which the most abased fetish-worshipper, and the Muhammadan could claim with full as much reason

as Anselm ; and in consideration of which his orthodox firmness becomes sheer unreasoning obstinacy. Yet, not all Christians were as moderate as Anselm. The Church does not lack her Tertullian who cried out : " It is credible, just because it is foolish ; it is certain because it is impossible (8)." In view of such opinions, we see the cogency of the emperor Julian's declaration against the Christians that " The highest point of your wisdom is to believe (9)."

4. *Defence of the Stand-point of Superstition.*—It is but natural, however, that Christians would have been, from time to time, forced to defend this stand-point. Cyril of Jerusalem (10) returned an answer which agrees almost word for word with that of Origen to this objection : " Why should it not be more reasonable, since all human affairs are dependent on faith, to believe God rather than men ? For who takes a voyage or marries or begets children or casts seeds into the ground without believing that better things will result, although the contrary might and does happen (11) ? " Cyril adds the example of the mariner who trusts himself on the ocean with but barely two inches of plank between himself and destruction ; Arnobius (12) adds many other like circumstances.

But these arguments do not prove what they were intended to show. Every one of these instances is a case in which reasonable experience has demonstrated that such a course, in the great majority of cases, yields satisfactory results. Doubtless, they are instances of the use of faith ; but it is not faith dominating and contradicting the experience of reason, but in every case being limited and dominated by it. No sailor trusts himself to the ocean till he has examined his craft, to assure himself she is seaworthy. The sower does not sow his seed in the desert or on stone pavement ; he carefully prepares the ground that is to receive it. Each of these instances is a capital proof of the rationalistic stand-point, and different in kind from faith in God, which, in its dogmatic statements, confessedly opposes or neglects reason.

5. *Modern Defence.*—Christian writers have in modern times pointed out that every advance of science is dependent on an exercise of faith. The doctrine of Conservation of Energy, which has been satisfactorily proved only in very isolated cases, has become a doctrine of faith, and as such has been the means of every achievement in physics, biology and psychology. By faith in the analogy of the families of chemical elements several elements were announced a few years before their actual discovery,—not only their mere existence affirmed, but their weight, nature, and properties predicted. If then, it is said, scientists must use faith in order to prophesy accurately, why should it not be equally right for souls to attain their salvation by faith ?

It may be shown, however, that in this argument there is the same undistributed middle we found in the last section. Religious and scientific faith are wholly different in their relation to reason.

Religious faith demands unquestioning assent, while refusing to permit any rational investigation of its mysteries : and everything which reason cannot understand is called a mystery.

Scientific faith, on the contrary, is founded on an induction of facts. Universal and exhaustive research of phenomena being out of the question, we can only say : as far as we have heard from investigators, we have always found that water is composed of two particles of hydrogen, to one of oxygen. Consequently, until we find a drop of water whose composition is different, we have the right to use our faith in declaring that all water is so composed. Hypotheses, on the strength of which experiments are made, are only partial inductions and are only valid as long as no undoubted fact incompatible with them is discovered. In such scientific research we have an admirable example of the use of human faith assisting, but in every case relying for its warrant on reason.

The earliest apostle of scientific faith was Abailard, whose efforts were futile only because scientific investigation was in those days impossible. Neander (¹³) says of him : "He assumed as his own position that faith proceeds first from enquiry, that it works itself out of doubt by means of rational investigation. In this respect, then, he makes faith develop itself out of intellection, because one must first know why and what he believes before one can believe ; though in another respect he acknowledged that this intellection has its root in faith."

6. *Scientific Faith not Necessarily Irreligious.*—Yet it may be asked, is scientific faith necessarily irreligious ? This question may be emphatically answered in the negative. It is possible to investigate the field of religious facts with scientific methods, using only scientific faith, and there is no reason why such investigations should not be as satisfactory as investigations in the field of physics or chemistry. In fact, the field of morals and of psychical phenomena has already been cleared for the scientific plow. Results have so far proved that nothing need be feared for any legitimate facts of human nature. Whereas it has been customary in former times to consider all apparitions of the dead as being imagination or deceit, a committee appointed by the Society for Psychical Research, the chairman of which was Dr. Sidgwick of Cambridge (¹⁴), has acknowledged that they must be granted credence, if properly authenticated. The veracity and standing of the investigators assure us that justice will be done to the subject, so that we have nothing to lose, but all to gain, by continued researches. Besides, if Christianity is co-extensive with truth, then truth must be co-extensive with Christianity ; and investigation can only vindicate it. The more ardent our religious faith in Christianity the more ardent should be our desire for its scientific investigation and vindication.

The opposition of Christianity to science, before and since

the condemnation of Galileo's heliocentric theory as scientifically absurd, and opposed to religious truth ⁽¹⁵⁾ might be interpreted as consciousness on its part of its own falsity, if we did not know it proceeded from nothing worse than ignorance of scientific methods and results, and from blind party prejudice, which would not in itself be criminal, if it did not oppose itself to the march of enlightenment.

7. *Mystery*.—Nor let this question of "mystery" be misunderstood. Nobody would object to a *bona-fide* mystery, which was immediately, on revelation from a satisfactory source to a reliable recipient, understood to be a mystery. But when hundreds of years elapse before it is discovered that a certain doctrine is a mystery; when every element of this supposititious mystery can be traced ultimately to pagan philosophy, or to religious utterances published first centuries before the revelation of the supposed mystery, then it is a question whether the particular "mystery" is not merely the formulation of undigested heterogeneous elements in the mind of a man who was not strong enough to fuse them, and who preferred to excuse the illogical by calling it a mystery. Moreover, even if a mystery was to be revealed, it could only be revealed to the mind of a man, which could only apprehend it by its reason. Hence, in the last resort, it is the reason of a man which must exist as the condition of any mystery. Besides, supposing that a revelation should have been granted which had no practical bearing on the moral life, and was incomprehensible, what use could it subserve? It could only be of value as a cabalistic magical incantation, like Solomon's 'Schemahamphorash!' Again reason would have to judge of its value, whether its effects were of any use or not. Hence, ultimately reason would be the arbiter.

8. *The Necessity of Thought*.—There is a final consideration which would seem to decide the question whether it is advisable to trust in reason or in superstition as criterions of truth. The fact is that whatever theories be held, reason is relied on, even to discredit itself. When, for instance, the argument against reason is put in this form, that it is untrustworthy as a guide, on account of such and such imperfections, it is evident that this very fallibility of reason is proved by absolute reliance on reason itself, by which any ratiocination must be conducted. Hence, in endeavouring to prove the fallibility of reason, we have actually given reason an infallible authority, and on account of its infallibility concluded to its fallibility. Do what we will, therefore, it is evident it is impossible for the human mind to transcend itself, and that even in suiciding, it vindicates itself.

This impossibility for rational beings of escaping from this kind of rationality need not be thought anything strange. It is only one phase of the universally recognized metaphysical impossibility of transcending thought. This is called the

“necessity of thought,” the impossibility of doubting one’s own doubt.

Do what man will, he cannot flee away from himself; he only knows himself in his consciousness, and outside of his consciousness, of course, he cannot be conscious of himself. Hence, reason is actually his guide and criterion of reality, even when he discredits it. Hence to exalt faith as against reason is self-contradictory, and a consideration of the facts forces man, in spite of himself, if he would use faith at all, to be rationally, and not irrationally a truster in faith.

9. *Throwing away the Handle after the Axe.*—It is objected to a reliance on reason that it is unsatisfactory. It is but an unsafe, and an untrustworthy guide.

This must be granted, for ignorant of himself must that man be who does not recognize how often his reason is a halting guide. Yet, it may be asked, supposing that this is so, what difference does it make? Grant that reason, as a guide of life, is not infallible, and yet, it is the best that we have, it is the best that we can have. Shall we throw away the only thing we have or can have because it is not better? Shall we not rather preserve it carefully, educate it as far as possible, and make it go as far as possible? Is it not better to do this than to suicide intellectually, and to be the plaything of a superstition which originally was founded on a pitiful attempt at rationality?

The light of reason is poor, perhaps, but it is better than darkness. Protect the flame from the rude blasts of the wind; trim the candle, and make the best of what you have. And perhaps, by careful education, reason may grow more able to be trusted, more continuous, more impartial, more likened unto the Divine Reason of which it is a faint, but yet genuine image.

NOTES.

(1) Justin Martyr, *Apol.* I. (2) *Ib.* (3) Arnobius, *Adv. Gent.* 57. (4) Lactantius, *Div. Inst.* ii: 7; see ii: 8.

(5) "But our Lord Christ surnamed himself Truth, not Custom. . . . It is not so much novelty as truth which convicts the heresies. Whatsoever savours of opposition to truth, this will be heresy, even if it be an ancient custom. . . . They who received Christ set truth before custom." Tertull. *De Virg. Vel.* 1. Also, Gratian's *Decretum*, Pars. I, Dist. 8, c. 4, and c. 5, Gregorius Winimundo Aversano, Augustine, *de Bapt. c. Donat.* iii: 5. On the general question, see Clem. Al. *c. Gent.* 10, 11; *Paed.* i: 7. Just. Mart. *Apol.* i: 12: "But if you also, like the foolish, prefer custom to truth. . . ." Greg. Nyss. *Gt. Cat.* 18. August. *c. Donat.* iii: 3, 5; iv: 5. Cyprian, in *Ep. 74 ad Pomp.* "For custom without truth is only the antiquity of error." Lact. *Div. Inst.* says: "Yet no one departs from us, since the truth itself detains him." *Ib.*, ii: 8: "It is therefore right, especially in a matter on which the whole plan of life turns, that every one should place confidence in himself, and use his own judgment and individual capacity for the investigation and weighing of the truth, rather than through confidence in others to be deceived by their errors, as though he himself were without understanding. God has given wisdom to all alike, that they might be able both to investigate things which they have not heard, and to weigh things which they have heard. Nor, because they preceded us in time, did they also outstrip us also in wisdom; for if this is given equally to all, we cannot be anticipated in it by those who precede us."

(6) Irenaeus, *Ref. Haer.* iii: iv: 1; iv: xxvi: 2; iv: xxxii: 1; iv: xxxiii: 8; v: xx: 1. Tertull. *De Praescr. Haer.*, cc. 13, 19, 20, 22, 37, 38, 40, 42. *Adv. Marc.* iii: 6; v: 5. Clem. Al., *Strom.*, vii: 16. Athanas. *Or. in Ar.*, i: 8; ii: 39, 40; *ad Serap.*, ii: 8; iv: 5. Origen said: "So, seeing there are many who think they hold the opinions of Christ, and yet some of these think differently from their predecessors, yet as the teaching of the Church, transmitted in orderly succession from the Apostles, and remaining in the Church till the present day, is still preserved, that alone is to be accepted as truth which differs in no respect from ecclesiastical and apostolical tradition." *De Princ. Proem.* 2. But Origen did not realize that this tradition might change. He could not have written the above words unless he considered himself to be in harmony with this tradition; and yet the time came when he was adjudged an heretic by this very tradition, which, of course, had changed in the meanwhile. This argumentum "a traditione" resolves itself ultimately into agreement with any doctrine which a majority of persons may at any time hold. Still further, it resolves itself into the doctrine that orthodoxy is my "doxy," and heterodoxy your "doxy," as in the classical instance of Athanasius.

(7) In Neander, *Ch. Hist.* viii: 104; *Cur Deus Homo.* (8) Tert. *Apol.* (9) In Hooker's *Eccles. Polity*, v: 63: 1. (10) Cyril, *Catech.* v: 3. (11) Orig. *C. Cels.* i: 11. (12) Arnobius, *Adv. Gent.* ii: 8. See Theoph. *ad Autol.*, i: 8. "If then the husbandman trusts the earth, and the sick man the physician, will you not place confidence in God?" (13) Neander, *Church Hist. in re.* (14) *Proceedings*, 1895. (15) See *Encycl. Brit.* sub. Galileo. Even that sympathetic account acknowledges that.