

ANSWERS



"THE SIGN OF THE CROSS."

THE Holy Catholic Church, the guardian and custodian of revealed religion and the living exponent of the teaching of Jesus Christ, contains in her sacred deposit of faith not only the dogmatic mysteries of Christian belief and the ethical principles of Christian morality, but also many beautiful customs and practices which though not explicitly inculcated in the Scriptural teaching of Christ are nevertheless thoroughly in accord both with the characteristics of true Christianity and the noblest aspirations of man's religious nature. Amongst these various customs and practices which have come down to us from the most remote ages of Christian history the devotion of the Sign of the Cross stands pre-eminent. It is a custom which is cherished with the most tender piety by the children of the Catholic Church in every land. None other has received such universal approbation, none enters so largely into the different phases of Catholic life, and none has ever exercised more salutary influence on Catholic morality than this beautiful and ancient practice. And yet there is no practice which has been subjected to such constant misrepresentation on the part of non-Catholics who cannot understand why we attach so much importance to a symbol apparently so trivial. For them it is a ceremony devoid of meaning, an irreligious observance—one of the many superstitions with which our religion abounds. These people have come to regard the Sign of the Cross in the same light as the mystic rites of the Jagas or the fetish symbols of the Damaras. This view of The Sign of the Cross is common to those outside the Church, and what makes it all the more unbearable is that it is shared in by those who wish to be considered as liberal and enlightened in everything appertaining to the religious customs of their Catholic fellow-citizens.

But for all true Christians of every age and nation the Sign of the Cross is no empty symbol or pagan fetish, but it is the glorious sign of man's redemption, reminding us of the infinite love of a God who gave up His life on Calvary's Cross for love of us; and who shall come again on the last day in the clouds of Heaven with the Cross by His side to judge the living and the dead. The official or public use of the Cross began with Constantine, though it had doubtless been employed in private devotion by the Christians at a much earlier period. In the differ-