

The Progress of Thought and the Faith.

Senate Reading Room

(American Catholic Quarterly Review.)

It has become the fashion of late, if indeed it be not a fashion nearly as old as the dogma which it professes to wish to recast, to express a desire for the restatement of Christian truth upon lines in keeping with the rapid advance of modern science. Our language, as is natural in a vehicle that embodies and conveys a thought not so much really changing or developing as growing in completeness of detail, itself changes so rapidly and so continuously in its shades and gradations of meaning, that for a Christian dogma to be correctly grasped and even to be understood at all, it must be stated as clearly and as definitely as is possible in those terms in which we actually and habitually think. This is doubtless true, even to a marked extent in some cases, in the mere modification of meaning which a word insensibly undergoes in consequence of a long service in popular usage. But it is the more striking, and in some senses the less to be looked for, in those cases in which our old concepts of things have received, or seem to us to have received, a sudden shock; when our philosophy or our science has summarily closed an old, to open a new, road upon which, under pain of solemn, to say nothing of positive error, we are therewith to travel if we are ever to reach a true and human solution of the great problems as to the real nature and meaning of the universe or of our own place within it. The progress of the century just closed has done more to remodel and reconstitute our mental horizon than perhaps any other in the long history of the Christian era. The greatest impetus, possibly, to the popularization of a scientific terminology, though certainly not at the same time to an outpouring of the true scientific spirit, was given by the French encyclopedists. The fascinating charm of the style in which the famous "Dictionnaire Raisonné" was written was doubtless the cause chiefly contributing to its popularity, but while the materialistic science it inculcated was absorbed into and spread through the literature of the period, it steadily sapped the vigor alike of science and philosophy. As Herzer has aptly pointed out, the brilliant literary work of the encyclopedists, the witty sarcasms of Voltaire, the irreverence, skepticism and flippancy of Diderot and D'Alembert, the scientific materialism of Holbach, did nothing to advance the genuine spirit of scientific research and accuracy, while, on the other hand, it undoubtedly had the effect of slurring over that exactness of significance in precise terms and ideas which is the first requisite of all knowledge. Thus began the work developed under the hands of La Mettrie and Cabanis. "It is unnecessary to say," I quote one of the most sober and able of modern authors (John Theodore Merz, "A History of European Thought in the Nineteenth Century"), "that none of them had the sanction of their great masters for the application they made of principles which had been established and used for special scientific purposes. From his (Lange's "History of Materialism") scholastic references, it is evident that the extreme views of La Mettrie, Diderot and Holbach cannot be ascribed to any of the great scientists or philosophers." It was an attempt, foredoomed to logical failure, though emulating and attaining a certain degree of popular adhesion and applause, to apply scientific principles, true enough in their place and for the purposes of science, to political, ethical and religious problems. It did not register or record any new discoveries in the realm of concrete experience; but it attempted to build a new edifice of interpretation upon the old.

Far different was the work of the real men of science—Lavoisier, Gay, Lussac and Pasteur, in France; Liebig, of Giessen; Schielden, of Jena, and Schwann, of Louvain; Harvey and the English chemists and natural philosophers. If they, too, beyond the borders of their actual experiment and observation, they advanced the true cause of science at the same time by the work they did. And whatever the shortcomings of certain scientific hypotheses advanced may be when they are used in connection with problems for which they were not framed and to which they will not apply, no exception can reasonably be made in the name of science for scientific purposes and with all the safeguards of scientific limitations. The doctrine of chemical equilibrium, the periodic law, the molecular theory or electronic hypothesis, the connection of life and consciousness with the circulation of the blood and energy and motor nerve actions—theories, all of which belong to biology and are the simple work of Primary, Sec-

ondary or tertiary science, as the French say. He goes on to form for his readers such a mental picture of the motion of atoms and molecules. Now a mental picture is an imagination; and we are incapable of imagining anything whatever that has not in some guise or other, come to us through the channels of sense and re-pression in our memory as a sense-impression. But whatever comes to us direct through sensation is phenomenal. Indeed, Ramsay quite concedes the phenomenal nature of ions in the sentence quoted. So that, here again, no advance is made toward ultimate reality or its explanation. But it is quite clear that anything that is capable of taking up locally from atoms to cathode, or vice versa, is a particle of matter, and that to explain it is quite as difficult, or quite as easy, a task as to set out at the beginning to explain plain matters before its structural delineation is presented in "mental pictures" to our minds.

Notwithstanding this very obvious distinction drawn by such undoubted men of science as Sir William Ramsay, there is a very general feeling that science really has penetrated to the arcana of nature, and the gibbous with which scientific terms and formulae fall from the lips of the multitude would apparently force a reconstruction of views even in the sphere of religion.

What were, before this cheap popularization of science and of scientific terminology, questions confined to purely theological limits—the conflict of logical systems, which in all, however illogical some might be as a matter of fact, had a basis in common upon which to argue upon things was a duel between revealed religion on the one hand and pure speculation upon the other, as exemplified in the Deists and Theists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, has lately become narrowed down, in the popular estimate at any rate, to a newer and more pertinent issue. There is now so much need to sharpen the weapons of logic or to finish up the defensive armor of Heidegger against those who, while calling themselves Christians, have lost touch with the centre of Christian unity. There is little advantage, even, in taking the field against professedly philosophical systems apparently inimical to the sure data of divine revelation. The conflict of day, if indeed conflict there can be said to be at all, is supposed to lie between the results of modern science and religious truth. I use the safeguarding words with purpose; for there is in reality no conflict between science and faith: as a matter of fact, science and revelation are incommensurable. Still, certain interpreters and popularizers of science have so far made it their business to evolve theories that apparently militate against the explanations and general bearings of dogma that there seems to be and is, in common opinion at any rate, a very real discrepancy between the findings of the exact science, as they are called, on the one hand, and the truths of divine revelation of the other.

For many people the strong a priori presumption that the one divine Author of revealed and of rationally discovered truth cannot contradict the one in any part of the other becomes a weapon that is drawn, in the name of a sturdy and certain faith, to check the more daring sallies of a wildly speculative scientific spirit. Such men are accustomed to point to the Church and to advance no other reason for any one particular point of dogma than that the Church teaches it. And this they do wisely, for they know that because he behind the assumptions of all science; and while they may realize that similar lacunae may lie between the natural interpretation of the world and the supernatural realities, they have the scaffolding of personal religious experience and the invisible pillar of faith to connect them in such fashion that there can be no room for doubt as to reality, truth and continuity of the two.

For others, the experience of observation seems to furnish so good a ground for the "scientific" beliefs that are raised upon it, that it is practically impossible for them not to stigmatize the claims put forward in favor of any supernatural revelation as altogether childish, effete and untrue.

Between these two extreme positions, the one filled by such men of faith as have little interest in or desire for scientific study pure and simple, and the other holding few besides materialists of whose principles the most notorious exponent at present is, perhaps, the somewhat discredited and much overrated professor, of Jena, there are many half-compromises.

The true theologian of the twentieth century, imbued with some such spirit as St. Thomas Aquinas poured out upon the schools of his day, invokes the presumption of identical authorship of both kinds of knowledge, revealed and natural, not to suppress or degrade either, but to harmonize and explain them both. A fact that is often lost sight of, and indeed that seems again and again to have been willfully distorted and misrepresented, may well be added to in this connection. St. Thomas, as the best representative of the truest and highest phase of

philosophy of the mediaeval schools, was quite accustomed to treat the problems upon which he wrote and taught by a method that would do credit to any modern man of science. We often hear of the baseless speculation, the trivial hair-splitting, the a priori argumentation of the scholastics. We are all familiar with the samples of reasoning that these logical web-spinners and weavers of angels can stand on the point of a needle? "Is it possible for God to substitute Himself for the devil, for an ass, for a gourd, for a flint? If so, in what way would the gourd preach, work miracles, or be fixed to the cross?" These and similar samples are given to the world as a fair specimen of the scholastic doctrine and discipline. Any one, however, who has made any pretense of reading such works as those that bear the name of St. Thomas, is aware of the utter ignorance and gross stupidity that makes such a presentation of scholasticism possible. When we are told, for example, in a note appended to the twenty-first chapter of the second book of St. Anselm's work that "this was one of the speculations of the schoolmen. It is assumed that angels are distinct and isolated creations of God. They are of the same nature, but not of one race," we can only wonder hopelessly as to where the knowledge of that writer and his teaching. The youngest students upon the benches of the theological class room could have put him right. Nothing of the kind is assumed. The doctrine, to which the writer of the note refers so cavalierly as "one of the speculations of the Schoolmen," flows logically and necessarily from the conception of the angels as a created being composed, not of matter and form, but of essence and existence. He may well be excused his ignorance in so difficult and so abstract a question; but the same excuse cannot be any stretch of charity be extended to those whose knowledge of the scholastic work is so limited that they are able to stigmatize it as unscientific, puerile and absurd.

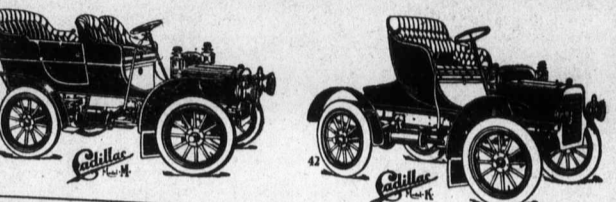
(Concluded in next issue.)

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A Brief Sketch of Sir Charles Fitzpatrick.

Sir Charles Fitzpatrick, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Canada, was born in Quebec city on December 19, 1853, and is consequently in his 54th year. He was educated at Ste. Anne's College, at the Quebec Seminary and at Laval University, graduating as a B.A. in 1873. He was called to the Bar of Quebec in 1876, and within three years had



won such distinction that he was appointed Crown Prosecutor for the city and district of Quebec. From that time on his professional progress was rapid. He was chief counsel for the United States Government in the Enno extradition case at Quebec, and for the Government of Belgium in the Tournal fraud case at Montreal. He acted as counsel in 1891 for Messrs. Connolly and McGreevy in connection with the charges preferred against them by Hon. J. I. Tarte, and was also counsel for the late Honorable Honore Mercier, Hon. Chas. Langelier and Mr. Ernest Pacaud in the political prosecutions initiated by the Conservative leaders in the Quebec House. In 1885 he acted as chief counsel for Louis Riel. In 1897 Mr. Fitzpatrick represented the Dominion Government before the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in the matter of the respective control of the federal and provincial authorities over the fisheries, and also when he was Solicitor-General of Canada after 1896. He was for some years president of the Quebec branch of the Irish Land League, and was a delegate to the Irish National Convention at Dublin in 1890.

He sat in the Legislative Assembly of Quebec from 1890 to 1896 for Quebec County. In 1896 he was elected for the same county to the House of Commons and sat continuously for that seat until June of last year, when he was appointed Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Canada. On the formation of the

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THE VULGATE REVISION.

Biblical Work Upon Which the Benedictines Are Engaged.

Dom Ilderbrande, Abbot Primate of the Benedictine Order, has furnished the following details of the work recently entrusted to the order by the Biblical Commission in connection with the Vulgate.

It has been stated that the Benedictines were engaged in a revision of the Vulgate, or an examination of its variants with a view to such revision. This work has been described as a continuation of that already undertaken but not yet concluded by the Barnabite monk Verellone. These statements have been inaccurate. The real nature of the work entrusted to the Benedictines is a reparation of the original text of St. Jerome, which is the Latin translation of the Bible recognized as authentic by the Catholic Church.

This version of the Bible is not the first one, as it was preceded by another known as the "Itala," which was raised by St. Augustine and was in use before St. Jerome's was. The original text of St. Jerome has suffered many alterations and changes. Just as a watercourse, however pure, loses its purity the further it is carried from its source, so the work of St. Jerome, transmitted for centuries, has lost much of its original perfection. Not that the original version was perfect, for it is more difficult than it was in 840-890, when St. Jerome lived.

The Holy See does not intend to replace the Vulgate version or translation from the original documents. St. Jerome's will remain the official authentic version, but the object aimed at by the Biblical Commission is to purify as much as possible the present text by means of corrections of its errors and the expurgation of inaccuracies, and thus bring it as near as possible to St. Jerome's original text.

The Benedictines will not continue Verellone's work, but will start from the very beginning, collecting every scrap of information on the subject, reading every book written by past and present generations, examining all the variants of the Vulgate and comparing all the ma-

PERSONAL.

A cablegram has been received from Sir Wilfrid Laurier to the effect that he will sail from Liverpool on July 12th. Notable receptions will mark his arrival home.

No person should go from home without a bottle of Dr. J. D. Koller's Dysentery Cordial in their possession, as change of water, cooking, climate, etc., frequently brings on summer complaint, and there is nothing like being ready with a sure remedy at hand, which often saves great suffering and frequently valuable lives. This Cordial has gained for itself a widespread reputation for affording prompt relief from all summer complaints.