



# True



# Witness

Vol. LV., No. 9

MONTREAL, THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 7, 1905.

PRICE FIVE CENTS

## A "RELIGION" WITHOUT A CREED

(By REV. P. A. SHEEHAN, D.D.)

(Continued from Last Week.)

What are the disputations of sects, or churches, or schools, to me? For three hundred years in the beginning of the Christian era, the whole Eastern Empire was torn asunder by wars, treachery, revolutions—Emperors fighting against emperors, Pope with Patriarch, Councils torn asunder, Churches warring with Churches, and nations with nations—for what? One single word and one word in the Creed. And since that time has not all European civilization been threatened with extinction through religious wars? Nay, Protestants though we are, we cannot help condemning Luther for that he revived an interest in dogmatic religious by defying its central authority just at the time when Europe was slowly but surely drifting back from the misery and squalor of the Dark Ages to the sweetness and light and natural lives and happiness of ancient Paganism. Yes, let us alone! We want to hear no more about dogmas or disputations—Arian or Anglican, Calvinist or Socinian, High Church or Low Church, Irvingite or Swedenborgian. We bend our necks to no man, no Church, no Creed. We claim the privilege of unshackled intellectual freedom. We pin our faith to no formulas. We subscribe to no articles. Within us is the light of reason. Without us the laws of society. That we shall follow these we obey. But Churches, Creeds, Confessions of Faith—

This theory, although admitting the necessity of some restrictions on human freedom, grants the widest latitude to that liberalism of thought which is claimed as the dearest privilege of humanity. We admit, it is said, the necessity of curbing human passion, of restricting desires within bounds compatible with the safety and comfort of others. But our thoughts must be free. We must be at liberty to believe, or not believe. Society may tie our hands and lock our lips; but no human authority shall or can restrict the God-given privilege of intellectual liberty. What is it to any man whether in the secrecy of my own soul I believe there is a God or no-God; a Trinity or no Trinity; a God-man, or a mere sage and philanthropist; a soul within me with eternal destinies before it, or I—a mere animal, with just the instincts, desires and end of the brute creation? I shall allow no man to put shackles on my intellect. The law will punish me if I break it. Quite sufficient then for me is the moral law, the law of society, my own conscience! I shall have none of them. If we want to worship, the expanse of Nature will be our sanctuary; the dome of Heaven our Temple; the interchange of courtesies with our kind our Ritual; the poets will be our Apostles; History our Evangelist. We shall worship in temples, not made by hands, and our Apotheosis shall be our final return to the inorganic creation. We are content to be merged in the universe of matter.

So say in speech and book and pamphlet, from press and platform, in prose and verse, essay and lecture the adherents of this the newest and most widely spread and the most specious and attractive form of atheism which has appeared in our time. And yet the inconsistency of those who argue thus is apparent. The consequences, if pushed to logical conclusions, would be calamitous.

For this "moral sense," innate or acquired, must rest on some principle. If the precept, "Thou shalt not kill," is accepted, the principle from which it originated and on which it depends must be accepted also. Surely it is not a mere whim or caprice of humanity that keeps men's hands from being imbrued in the blood of their fellow-men. It is not a sentiment of mercy or compassion or mere humanitarianism that protects the world from promiscuous murder. How valueless such sentiments are in a whirlwind of rage and passion, such as is let loose in war, or in a theatre panic, we know well. There must be some underlying prin-

ciple, tacitly acknowledged by the entire race, and which is formulated in the theory or statement in which all men acquiesce: "It is wrong and criminal to shed the blood of another." But that is dogma. Therefore, in accepting the common religious and social principle, you put the yoke of dogma around your neck.

The same rule applies to every moral principle by which society is cemented and solidified. The Church says: "Whoever declares or holds that it is right to steal, or rob, or murder, or bear false witness, let him be anathema." The non-dogmatist says: "Every man possesses a moral sense, and this declares that it is criminal in se, and subversive of all moral order, to steal, or murder, or bear false witness; and whosoever holds this criminal theory is only fit to be put outside the pale of civilization." Where here is the difference in the formula? The veriest non-dogmatist has "anathema" on his lips as well as the dogmatic church.

Yes, but we are not speaking now of moral precepts, is the reply. There we are at one. We admit that the basis of all morality is the dogmatic principle. What we repudiate is your Councils, your decrees, your fine-drawn definitions and distinctions about articles of Faith, of whose inner meaning you can know nothing, much less teach us. We freely admit that the moral teachings of Christianity are very beautiful; and we try to fashion our lives thereon. But we stop there. As to the person of Christ, His origin, His nature, His mission, His miracles, His power, we know nothing. We accept His moral teachings as quite in consonance with our "moral sense." We reject all dogmas connected with His person, His mission, or His miracles.

### THE TRIUMPH OF THE INCARNATION.

But does not all the force of the supreme moral teaching of Christ come from the fact that He was a Divine teacher? Why do you not accept the teachings of Confucius, of Socrates, of Seneca, of Marcus Aurelius, of Epictetus? Because they were men, liable to error; and because they spoke without authority. What has given weight to the words of Christ, such weight that even today, after nineteen hundred years, they are accepted as the supreme embodiment of all ethical teaching? The answer is, His authority. The authority of a mere sage or philosopher? Certainly not. This would bring Him down to the level of Socrates. What then? His authority, as God. There is no denying it. There is no possible suppression of that faith, latent and dormant in some minds, but existent in all minds that Christ is the Son of the Living God. The very hatred men bear to Him, their blasphemies against His adorable name, prove this. If He were a mere sage, the world would bow its head and pass Him by. But the world knows He is much more, and hence it rages against Him. It cannot separate His teachings from His mission. It cannot separate His mission from His person. It cannot separate His person from His Godhead. Whether it accept His teaching as the supreme moral code for humanity, or rejects with hatred His teaching and His Person alike, it admits unconsciously and unwillingly, by adapting His moral law to its own moral sense, the dogma of the Incarnation.

In the same way, non-dogmatists have to confess their belief in God, His attributes and His perfections. The moment they accept the natural law or the guidance of reason, they profess their faith in the goodness and omniscience, the mercy and justice of God. For if there be a moral code, or conscience, innate to the human soul, it cannot spring from mere animal nature; nor from instinct; nor from experience; nor from the habits of advanced civilization; without some external inspiration. This is the voice of God, and behind it is the dogma of Divine Providence. If there be a moral

law directing the will, there must be some dogmatic influence controlling the intellect. Law is universal, inexorable. In the organic and inorganic kingdoms it is the one thing that is most clearly in evidence. All things are controlled by law, and bow to its behests. Can the intellect of man alone break away from the Universe and be uncontrolled? Is man's intellect the one exception to the Cosmos that reigns throughout the universe? Who emancipated it from the universal order, and gave it a charter of unlicensed liberty? Or, who flung the reins over its back and bade it go forth, uncured and unbridled, while all things else, even the paramount will of man, have to suffer themselves to be dragged into discipline and obedience by that tremendous centripetal force, which we designate Law in the inorganic and lower animal creation, and conscience or the moral sense in man? The suggestion can be advanced only to be rejected. Such an irregularity would be opposed to all known laws. It would be a deordination in a world of order.

But if the intellect, like all things else, has to be curbed, it is quite clear that, from its very nature, that curb must be intellectual; that is, the intellect must submit to accept some primary truths, formulated by some authority, external to itself. And these truths, thus addressed to the intellect, can take but one shape, that of dogmatic truth. What Law is therefore to the organic or inorganic creation—universal, inexorable, imperious and necessary; what the "moral sense" or conscience, is to the will of man, even that is dogma to the intellect. You may reject Nicene or Athanasian Creeds; you may spurn the Thirty-Nine Articles or other formulas. You cannot get rid of dogma. Even Carlyle, who raved the changes of unlimited scorn on the early controversies of Christianity, was compelled to admit at last that on the acceptance or non-acceptance of that one vowel in the Creed of Nicene the whole of Christianity depended.

### ATHEISM BEGETS ANARCHY.

But, if we suppose that dogma could be suppressed, or public morals made independent of it, political economists would be compelled to fall back upon the monistic theory and the consequences of Natural Selection pushed to the extremes by the proletariat, or on some theory of social ethics or humanitarianism, which would be equally calamitous. Nay, we are witnesses in these latter times of such disasters coming down upon society from the denial of dogma and the repudiation of authority. For what is Saint-Simonism, with its ugly brood of Socialists, Nihilists, Communists, French "Soldiers," Italian Anarchists, etc., but the logical consequence of the denial of any dogmas binding the intellect and the denial of moral law binding the will of man? It is easy for a modern doctrinaire, seated at his writing desk, surrounded by his books, or lolling in his reading chair, to sweep away creeds and formularies, and ridicule rites and ritual, that really belong to humanity, and must take form in some shape to satisfy man's needs. But, when the apparently harmless, speculative denunciations of existing beliefs or governments take root in the minds of the vast army of the disappointed and discontented, and altars are overturned and governments upset, men begin to perceive how easily theories pass into practice and how evil a crop may develop from poisonous seed. Between Carlyle, fulminating from his sound-proof attic in Chelsea against all existing creeds, governments and social life; and Karl Marx, accepting all this denunciation as the righteous condemnation of existing shams and chimeras, where is the difference? The appeal to "Verities" and "Unverities," when men are told there is nothing true nor genuine, nor honest under the sun, will have the effect of sharpening the hunger and quieting the conscience of the mob, which demands an equality that it will not concede and a common proprietorship in goods that are not its own. And when all fear and hope and reverence are removed from the minds of men by the deliberate denial of every dogma, and therefore of all moral restraint, what can be expected but Atheism in theory and Anarchy in practice?

### HERBERT SPENCER'S LAST WORD.

"Whilst the current creed was slowly losing its hold on me, the whole question seemed to be the truth or untruth of the particular doctrines I had been taught. But, gradually, and especially of later years, I have become aware that this is not the sole question. Partly, the wider knowledge obtained of human society, has caused this. Many have, I believe, recognized the fact that a cult of some sort, with its social embodiment, is a constituent in every society which has made any progress. The masses of evidence classified and arranged in the Descriptive Sociology have forced this belief on me independently, if not against my will, still without any desire to entertain it. There seems to be no escape from the inference that the maintenance of social subordination has peremptorily required the aid of

some such agency. \* \* \* Thus I have come to look more and more calmly on forms of religious belief to which I had in earlier days a profound aversion. Holding that they are in the main naturally adapted to their respective peoples and times, it now seems to me well that they should severally live and work as long as the conditions permit; and further, that sudden changes of religious institutions, as of political institutions, are certain to be followed by reactions. Largely, however, if not chiefly, this change of feeling toward religious creeds and their sustaining institutions has resulted from a deepening conviction that the sphere occupied by them can never be an unfilled sphere; but that there must continue to arise afresh the great questions concerning ourselves and surrounding things; and that, if not positive answers, then modes of consciousness, standing in the place of positive answers, must ever remain. By those who know much, more than by those who know little, is there felt the need for explanation. Thus religious creeds, which in one way or another occupy the sphere that rational interpretation seeks to occupy and fails, and fails the more the more it seeks, I have come to regard with a sympathy based on community of need, feeling that dissent from them results from inability to accept the solution offered joined with the wish that solution could be found."

### GOD OR THE MOB MUST RULE.

It is impossible to disprove that logical and peremptory sequence—No dogma, No ethics; it is impossible to bind the conscience of men with shadowy abstractions and vague appeals to phantom virtues, undefined by doctrinal truth and unsupported by some supreme authority, which makes the practice of such virtues imperative. It lends but sanction to human vice and passion to say: Live noble lives, and quit yourselves like men in the fight! The question will recur: "What are noble lives?" and what means "to quit ourselves like men?" Robin Hood and his merry men had their own code of morals, because

"the good old rule Sufficed for them, the simple plan, That they should take who have the power, And they should keep who can."

But Robin Hood and every pirate and freebooter that ever lived, believed that they were living free, noble lives; and that certainly "they quitted themselves like men in the fight." And who can now deny that the world, in spite of its lip-Christians, has always had a secret sympathy with these children of the road, or with the footpads and homelides on a larger scale, whom it calls its heroes and its conquerors? But, will this do? Can society hang together on such theories? Or must there not be some voice, as of Sinai, to pronounce first the everlasting dogma:

"I am the Lord, thy God,"

and then, as a consequence, the inexorable precepts:

"Thou shalt" and "Thou shalt not."

Yes, it is perfectly futile to pretend that men must lead clean, just, honorable lives unless some one defines what are purity, justice and honor. But, behind that definition there must be authority; and behind that authority must be its credentials founded on dogmatic truth.

It may be said that all this is so manifest that while the multitude still clings to its pleasant formula: "Religion, but no creed, no church," the leading thinkers among unbelievers willingly admit that this idea is neither logical nor reasonable. Hence, the curious change that has come over the tone and temper of certain leading scientists in our time. Instead of the fierce, bitter scorn, cast upon religious beliefs by the whole French school, and imitated, to their eternal shame, by certain English thinkers, there appears now a quiet half-apologetic, wholly deprecatory tone, as of men who boasted incontinently of their security and have found the ground slipping from beneath their feet. We have already seen how Carlyle modified his scornful invectives against the Fathers of the early Councils, and just now we find in Herbert Spencer's Autobiography, which may be accepted as his last word and the expression of his most mature convictions, the following significant, if half-hearted declaration, that a religious creed or cultus of some kind is a necessity. Coming from the pen of so thorough a scientist, who has been all his life preaching the steady progression of mankind by "evolution" and the processes of natural selection" and the perfectibility of the species which is but awaiting time and opportunity for development they bear their own lesson:

"Whilst the current creed was slowly losing its hold on me, the whole question seemed to be the truth or untruth of the particular doctrines I had been taught. But, gradually, and especially of later years, I have become aware that this is not the sole question. Partly, the wider knowledge obtained of human society, has caused this. Many have, I believe, recognized the fact that a cult of some sort, with its social embodiment, is a constituent in every society which has made any progress. The masses of evidence classified and arranged in the Descriptive Sociology have forced this belief on me independently, if not against my will, still without any desire to entertain it. There seems to be no escape from the inference that the maintenance of social subordination has peremptorily required the aid of

some such agency. \* \* \* Thus I have come to look more and more calmly on forms of religious belief to which I had in earlier days a profound aversion. Holding that they are in the main naturally adapted to their respective peoples and times, it now seems to me well that they should severally live and work as long as the conditions permit; and further, that sudden changes of religious institutions, as of political institutions, are certain to be followed by reactions. Largely, however, if not chiefly, this change of feeling toward religious creeds and their sustaining institutions has resulted from a deepening conviction that the sphere occupied by them can never be an unfilled sphere; but that there must continue to arise afresh the great questions concerning ourselves and surrounding things; and that, if not positive answers, then modes of consciousness, standing in the place of positive answers, must ever remain. By those who know much, more than by those who know little, is there felt the need for explanation. Thus religious creeds, which in one way or another occupy the sphere that rational interpretation seeks to occupy and fails, and fails the more the more it seeks, I have come to regard with a sympathy based on community of need, feeling that dissent from them results from inability to accept the solution offered joined with the wish that solution could be found."

There is no need of paraphrasing this singular admission. But why Herbert Spencer did not move a step further, and perceive that if the laws of right and wrong are eternal and unchangeable, the culture which subordinates human passion to such laws must be formed and based on eternal and unchangeable truth, and not allowed to shift and modify itself to suit merely human exigencies, is a problem that his Autobiography does not solve. And remaining insoluble now for ever, it is another proof of the limitations that will always surround the highest philosophic conceptions when unilluminated by Divine faith. But his testimony is at least valuable as a corroboration of our thesis and all the more valuable as the result—the unwelcome result—of an experience of eighty years.

## Notes from the Parishes

### ST. ANN'S PARISH.

The St. Ann's Young Men's Society held a pilgrimage to St. Placid on Labor Day, which was largely attended notwithstanding the unfavorable weather. At the church Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament was imparted by Rev. Father Rioux, P.P., assisted by Rev. Fathers Strubbe and Holland.

Next Sunday the regular monthly meeting of the T. A. & B. Society will be held in the afternoon.

### ST. ANTHONY'S PARISH.

Last Sunday evening Rev. Thos. Heffernan preached an eloquent sermon to the members of the League of the Sacred Heart, the subject being the intention for the month, viz., The Clergy.

The tickets for the event of the season, the sail to Lake St. Peter, are selling well and a large crowd will be in attendance.

### ST. MICHAEL'S PARISH.

The new school for the parish will open on Monday, and the pastor is anxious that parents should send their children the first day. The place is neatly fitted up, and a successful year is anticipated.

### ST. AGNES ACADEMY.

St. Agnes Academy, the new girls' school for St. Anthony's parish, has just been completed. The building is an excellent one. The spacious class rooms, all suitably appointed, the music hall, the library, the hall for calisthenics, etc., all combine to make the new school very attractive. Both pastor and people are to be congratulated. There is yet a missing link in the parish, a boys' school. We hope to see this supplied in the near future.

## ITEMS OF INTEREST.

St. Patrick's T. A. and B. Society will meet next Sunday afternoon.

The schools have re-opened after midsummer vacation, and large numbers are in attendance.

The Canadian Artisans held their religious celebration on Sunday at Notre Dame Church. After Mass a banquet was served at which Bishop Archambault, of Joliette, presided.

The eclipse at Labrador last week was a complete failure owing to cloudy weather. The party of scientists will reach Quebec to-day, among them being Rev. Father Kavanagh, of St. Mary's College.

### LOUIS STRATHCONA'S GENEROSITY.

A few days ago the President of St. Patrick's T. A. & B. Society, Mr. J. H. Kelly, received a letter from Lord Strathcona containing a cheque for fifty dollars as a contribution to the funds of the oldest total abstinence organization in North America.

### CONFERRED DEGREES.

The celebration of the golden jubilee of St. Francis Xavier's College, Antigonish, practically began on Tuesday. Yesterday afternoon the actual proceedings began with an address by the Right Rev. Dr. Cameron, Bishop of Antigonish, Chancellor of the University, after which degrees were conferred in absentia, but the list of those honored with LL.D. includes the president of almost every college in Canada, particularly the denominational ones, besides many other educationists. Among the public men who got degrees were the Hon. R. L. Borden, Sir Wilfrid Laurier, Sir Frederick Borden, the Hon. Mr. Murray, Premier.

### CATHOLIC SAILORS' CONCERT.

The concert room of the Catholic Sailors' Club was thronged to overflowing last evening, on the occasion of the entertainment given by the Young Men's Society of St. Mary's parish. The chair was occupied by Mr. J. O'Reilly, 1st vice-president. The young men were encouraged in their efforts by the presence of the Rev. Fathers Malone, Domelly, T. F. Heffernan and R. E. Callahan. The programme was excellently rendered. The concertina solo by Mr. Cummings, of the ss Canada; the clog-dance by the Murray Bros., the whistle selections of Mr. Mountain of ss Monford, and the singing of the Misses Garry, Henessey, Anderson and Power, the recitations of Miss and Mrs. Pitts, and Mr. Conway were certainly well rendered. Messrs. J. Benoit, our old friend seaman Cameron, Mr. P. Fox and Mr. Caldwell did their parts well. The dancing of the O'Kane Bros. and Mr. Watts, together with an exhibition of the nanby art by the Fisher Minstrels brought to a close one of the most pleasant evenings as yet spent with our friends the sailors. Too much praise can hardly be given to the various organizations which have so manfully taken up the entertainment in behalf of the Catholic sailors, and we hope that other friends will not be slow to follow the noble example placed before them.

### PERSONAL.

Miss C. J. Brennan, Hypolite street, returned Tuesday evening from Orange, Mass., where she had been spending a vacation.

The friends of Miss Christine Conroy, of St. Patrick street, will be much pleased to learn that at the summer exams she obtained a full Academic Diploma. Her teachers, the Sisters of the Holy Cross (Centre street) have every reason to congratulate themselves on her success.

Perfection consists not in doing extraordinary things, but in doing ordinary things extraordinarily well. Christian charity be in your heart your whole life may be a continual exercise of it.