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FENELON AND SIR MICHAEL RAMSAY.

The conversion of Sir Michael Ramsay by Fenelon is of so interesting a character that we think we may be doing some service by reviving it at the present moment. Sir Michael was descended from the ancient house of Ramsay in Scotland, and was educated at Oxford, where he obtained a doctor's degree. From his youth he exhibited a very decided taste for mathematics and theology. He very soon discovered the instability and fallacy of the Anglican creed. Having floated for some time on a vast sea of philosophical opinions, he determined to consult the Anglican and Dutch divines, but his doubts and difficulties were any thing but removed. Ramsay could find no where a resting place until he presented himself to Fenelon, Archbishop of Cambray. We now purpose dwelling for a little while on the gentle manner which the dove of Cambray adopted in enlightening the philosophic mind of Ramsay. Amongst other things, Fenelon observed to him—

"That Christianity, or, rather, the establishment of Christianity, is a fact. It is not susceptible of that rigid metaphysical evidence and testimony in its favor.—Is there any thing in history which you more firmly believe than this very fact of which we are speaking? Can reason allow you to doubt of this fact and all its circumstances? There is, then a Christian religion. Are not the reasons and motives for believing it satisfactory and conclusive? What can you object against it that is sound and admissible? And where is this religion more strikingly seen and maintained than in the Catholic church?—Does not this church hold the same symbol or creed as the apostles—the same sacraments, the same worship, the same morality, the same government? We know the time when and the place where the various separatists from the church spread their dissensions and ravages. We know (said Fenelon) the motives which led to these desolating schisms: pride, jealousy, obstinacy, and sometimes passions of a more shameful and degrading character. How, then, can you admit the authority of such sectarian leaders, and refuse to submit to the authority of the head of the church? Private judgment (the liberty of interpreting every thing as we please, and arbitrarily judging of every thing, even of things that we cannot understand or comprehend)—do not these all lead to the most fatal consequences? Is not this the source of all those systems of infidelity which disfigure the face of the earth, break down all the barriers and sap all the foundations of the social system?"

"If there is a God (and who can for an instant doubt it) the Christian, the Catholic religion is true; and if there is not a God, then there is no moral code or restraint, no obligation, consequently, of living even as a man.

"When men assail religion their plan is to dress it up as a monster—to caricature and calumniate it; and thus it is that they libel, judge, and reject it. Let them examine it dispassionately; let them trace it from its origin & thro'out its progress;

let them endeavor to form an acquaintance with it from pure sources: let them try to taste it, to practice it, and not censure and ridicule its ministers and its followers, who know little of its maxims, and they will invariably find it holy, invariably reasonable, invariably consoling."

"I weighed," says Ramsay, "the force of this reasoning; I saw clearly that there was no admitting a revealed law without admitting a living interpreter. My heart was true and sincere, and Fenelon knew it. He placed his reasons before me with such sweetness, patience, and exquisite preciseness; he manifested such zeal and magnanimity in instructing me, that I was almost overcome. But my pride still held out and contrived to envelope with frightful mists truths so admirably calculated to persuade and convince.

"After much hesitation, distrust, temptation, &c., I resolved to give Fenelon my confidence. It was cordially received. Still I found many embarrassments. The shame of yielding and obeying gave importance to the various difficulties suggested by myself, and which my ambitious reason failed not to magnify. I sunk into a profound melancholy. Fenelon endeavoured to divert me and console me, but never urged me. 'Examine,' said he, 'examine leisurely and pray much.'

"I see clearly," observed Ramsay to him, "that there is no middle way between Deism and Catholicity; but, rather than believe what Catholics believe, I prefer rushing into the other extreme."

"You would be ashamed," Fenelon quietly replied, "you would be ashamed to believe as they do, although they believe nothing but what is true. He then laid before me a rapid yet clear exposition of the Jewish religion, of the Christian faith, of the submission which it demands, and of the light and help which it supplies to its followers. 'How happy,' exclaimed he, 'would the world be if all would submit to this holy law! How easy is it to understand it, how delightful to follow it? Its sublimity and intelligibility, if I may be allowed the expression, evidently prove that it has God for its author, that he intended it for all men, and that all are bound to embrace it. Bright and dazzling as it is (continued Fenelon,) I acknowledge that it has its mysterious clouds and shadows. But ought not the true religion, is it not intended to elevate and humble man, to shew at once his greatness and his littleness? By following its morality we renounce pleasure for the love of supreme beauty; by believing its mysteries we sacrifice our ideas to eternal truth. In this manner it is that man sinks away and disappears before the Being of beings.—The question is not whether we are to examine if it be necessary that God should reveal to us his mysteries in order to humble us; the point is to know whether he has or has not revealed them. If he has spoken to his creature, the obedience and love are inseparable. Christianity is a fact.—As you do not and cannot doubt of this fact, it belongs not to you to choose what you will believe or what you will not believe. All the difficulties which you have gathered together will vanish when pride and presumption are dislodged from the mind.

"Is not God in possession of an infinite knowledge, to which we are perfect strangers? When He is pleased to unfold to us certain revelations by means of a supernatural voice, it is not for us to examine the why or the wherefore of these mysteries, but merely the certainty of the revelations. They may appear to us incompatible, though in reality they are not so; and this apparent incompatibility springs from the weakness of our mind, which has not sufficient knowledge to observe the connexion between our natural ideas and these supernatural truths.

"Purely to love (said Fenelon,) humble to believe—here is the Catholic religion!—Properly speaking, we have but two points of belief: the love of an invisible God and obedience to the living oracle of his church. Every other particular truth is absorbed and swallowed up in these two simple and universal truths; which are within the reach of every one's capacity. Can there be any thing more worthy of the divine perfection or more essential and necessary to human weakness?

"Instead of employing the ray of light that we possess to guide us from our state of darkness, we lose ourselves in a labyrinth of disputes, errors, chimerical systems and particular sects. Hitherto you have been seeking to become possessed of truth; now it is necessary that truth should possess and captivate you, and strip you of all those pretended mental riches in which you have been confiding. To be perfect Christians it is necessary that we divest ourselves of every thing, even of our ideas. Catholicity alone can properly teach that poverty which the Gospel recommends. Impose silence, then, on your imagination and your restless reason, and say frequently to God; teach me. O God, through the heart and not through the mind; make me believe as the saints have believed; make me love as the saints loved. Thus shall you be extricated from all fanaticism and from all incredulity."

In this way did Fenelon make Ramsay feel that we cannot consistently be a Deist without becoming a Christian, nor philosophically a Christian without becoming a Catholic. After six months' intercourse with Fenelon, Ramsay became a member of the Catholic church. He was the author of many works. He died in 1743.

PLAN OF THE PROOFS OF RELIGION.

BY HONARD DE LA MOTTE.

I find pleasure and pain existing in the world. Each one's experience convinces him of this.

I also find in it the idea of right and wrong. All society depends upon this idea. Every where and in every language, it is said: you have done right, you have done wrong; that is the act of an honest man, that is the act of a rogue.

We do not endow ourselves with this sensibility to pleasure and to pain; neither have we given ourselves the idea of right and of wrong.

But the idea of right and wrong presupposes a law and also free will. A law, because there cannot be a right and a wrong but in accordance with, or in violation of, some rule.

Free will, because necessity has no choice, and the idea of right and wrong supposes a choice of action; thus, we cannot either praise or blame a stone for falling, nor a flame from ascending.

A law necessarily pre-supposes a law-giver, and free-will necessarily superinduces merit and demerit.

Merit and demerit have a natural connexion with pleasure and pain.

According to these ideas, I ask any man, supposing he had to distribute pleasure and pain, if he would not give the pleasure to the good and the pain to the bad, and always in proportion, the greatest pleasures to the best and the greatest pains to the worst.

Such is indubitably the idea of distributive justice impressed on every mind. We must then infer that such is the conduct of the law-giver; otherwise we would look upon him as a senseless tyrant, who punished those who obliged him, and rewarded those only who were in rebellion against him.

Interest and reason, then, oblige man to study well the law imposed upon him, and to conform to it in the hope of happiness, as he must avoid infringing it from the fear of misery.

Anterior to any written law, man was bound to remain faithful to certain principles which he found in his heart, and which he had not placed there. This is the state of natural law.

A new state. God wills to manifest himself still farther to man, and to give him a written law as the development and perfection of the former. What ought man to do? To assure himself that it is God who speaks, that he may obey His orders.

I suppose myself a witness of the miracles which God performed in revealing His will to me. He changes, at his pleasure, the laws of nature, to prove to me that he is their master. I reason in this way: either it is God who speaks and I ought to obey him, or else God has lent all His power to the support of falsehood, and in this case He would be the criminal, which entirely overthrows every idea which I have of Him and which He Himself has given me.

But I have not witnessed the miracles and the revelation. I am only told that they took place: my interest and my reason then oblige me to enlighten myself on this point, if there are any means of doing so: and there are such means.

Facts are proved in two ways, either by impressing themselves on the senses of those who are witnesses of them; or else by the strength of the testimony which attests them; this strength of testimony may be so great as to take the place of the senses themselves. But, it is said, these facts are supernatural, and therefore less credible; they are distant from us, and therefore still less credible.

Not so; supernatural facts can be judged of by the senses as well as natural facts; and the senses are as sure in one case as in the other. A people who have crossed the sea dryshod between the divided waters, are as sure of this miracle as of the ordinary state of the sea.

Distant facts, natural or supernatural, are equally proved by the force of testimony.