

PHILOSOPHY.



"Though by whim, envy or resentment led
They damn those authors whom they never read."

ERE a number of students from our various universities to meet (a thing of too rare occurrence) Philosophy would probably be the last subject to furnish matter for conversation.

Yet, the influence of ideas would hardly be denied by any intelligent student unless by one of those whose minds are so developed by special courses of study that they can take no interest in anything outside of their specialties. The mere mathematician (with no disrespect for the exact sciences I say it) would probably dismiss a philosophical question with scant courtesy. The modern language man would, no doubt, expatiate on the beauties of language and literature without trenching much on the domain of philosophy as he understands it. The natural scientist, engrossed in the interpretation of the grand book of nature, would prefer something more tangible than abstruse speculation. Even the philosopher, of the secular colleges, prides himself rather on his knowledge of the various systems which have risen and influenced or still influence human thought, than on the conviction of the truth of any one of them. He accepts, perhaps, in the main some particular system but reserves the right of rejecting what he considers bad in it, and of taking what he considers good from any or all of the others. To this exaggerated notion of the importance of the History of Philosophy he adds a remarkable indifference to one system in particular. So far as the scholastics are concerned he adopts Descartes' view, "*Je ne veux pas même savoir s'il y a eu des hommes avant moi.*" Perhaps I should not say that Protestants are indifferent to the learning of the Schools; though their uniform neglect to study it seriously might seem to warrant the use of the term, their unstinted and unreasonable abuse of the Schoolmen would seem to indicate hatred rather than indifference. They exhibit a strange consistency in this,

for Eclecticism is to Philosophy what Private Judgment is to Revelation. Both rest in the modest fundamental principle that the luminous intellect of the individual is the supreme criterion of truth. Catholics deny the right of private judgment in matters of faith, and afford but an obscure niche in the temple of Philosophy to Victor Cousin. The mind is not the measure of the truth of the object; but the object is the measure of the truth of the mind. Not to be accused of meaningless abstractions let us take an example: a sentence in the Bible has a certain definite meaning which is entirely independent of the meaning you may attribute to it. Your mind is not the measure of the truth of this sentence, but the truth contained in this sentence is the measure of the truth of your interpretation. The true way of interpreting the scriptures forms no part of this article; but admit the principle "Truth is objective" and Private Judgment becomes, to a logical mind, absurd. This principle makes Eclecticism in Philosophy equally untenable. Hence it is that Catholics, the world over, make Philosophy the crowning study of a university course; and hence it is also that the system of philosophy evolved by reason, in the light of revelation, is substantially the same in Catholic schools throughout the world. This is the much despised Scholastic philosophy. To vindicate Scholastic philosophy from the numerous and oft-repeated columnies of which it is the subject would be impossible in the compass of a brief article, but it may be shown that there are two sides to the question. Even Catholics in Protestant or secular universities (an anomaly difficult of explanation) are carried on with the popular current of scorn for the "dark ages" and their learning. One of these attending a university where, by the way, the professor was an idealist, announced himself to be a faithful disciple of Locke. Later on in the conversation he inquired "who is St. Thomas?" This is not imagination, it is fact. What an ignoramus a student of a Catholic college would be voted were he to ask "who is Kant?"