MIRACLES AND SCIENCE

SCIENTIFIC INEXACTITUDES. NEW NAMES FOR OLD TRUTHS. POSSESSION AND EXORCISM. FACTS, NOT FANCIES

Up to fifty years ago it was commonly asserted by thinkers who were at that particular date "modern," that the phenomena alleged by Catholics to have been manifested as certain holy places, or in the lives of holy people, simply did not take place and never had taken place because miracles were obviously impossible. It was a magnificent and beautiful act of faith to make—an act of faith since it rested upon an unproved negative principle, and a universal principle at that—but it was not science. For within the last fifty years it has gradually been discovered that the events did take place, and still take place, in every corner of the world. For example, the Church has observed for about two thousand years that every now and then a certain human being manifested every sign of being two persons in two characters within one organism; further she observed that the use of very forcible and dramatic language administered by authority, if persevered in long enough frequently, but not infallibly, had the effect of banishing one of these apparent personalities. She called the first phenomenon "Possession," and the second "Exorcism." I suppose that there was no detail of the Church's belief more uniformly mocked than this was. Yet at present there is hardly a single modern psychologist of repute who is not familiar with these phenomena, and who does not fully acknowledge the facts. It is true that "modern thinkers" give other names to the phenomena—"alternating personalities" to the one, and "suggestion" to the other— but at least the facts are acknowledged.

It would be possible to multiply parallels almost indefinitely. Communications made at a distance by other than physical means; phantasms of the living (called by the Church "bi-location"), and of the dead; faith-healing; the physical effect of monotonous repetition; the value of what the church calls "sacramentals," that is, of suggestive articles (such as water) in which there is no intrinsic spiritual value; even the levitation of heavy bodies; even the capacity of inanimate objects to retain a kind of emotional or spiritual aroma of the person who was once in close relations to them (as in the case of relics) —all these things, or most of them are allowed to-day, by the most materialistic of modern thinkers, if not actually to be established facts, at least to be worthy of very serious and reverent consideration. When men like Sir Oliver Dodge, Professors Richet, Sidgwick and Lombroso are willing to devote the chief energies of their lives to the investigation of these things, it is hardly possible even for other scientists to dismiss them as nonsense.

Now, I am not concerned here with the discussion of the two main explanations given to these facts by Catholics on the one side, and "modern thinkers" on the other; for each explanation rests on a theory of the entire cosmos. The Catholic who is quite certain that a supernatural world, peopled by personalities, lies in the closest possible relation with this, is perfectly reasonable in attributing phenomena of this kind to those relations. The "modern thinker" who either does not believe in the supernatural world, or who thinks it indefinitely distant (whether in time or space), is simultaneously absolutely certain that all the phenomena of this world arise from the powers of his own superb act of faith. But it is surely very significant and suggestive to find that whatever the theories may be, at least on the actual facts professedly the particular province of the "modern thinker" the Church has been perfectly right, and the "modern thinkers" perfectly wrong; and that Church has not only enjoyed through her "Tradition" (which is another word for continuous consciousness) wider and longer experience, but has actually been more accurate in her observations.

It is so entirely unreasonable to think that, since she has been right in her facts, she is at least entitled to some consideration with regard to her interpretation of them? For, after all, the Church is not so absolutely idiotic as some of her critics appear to think. She too is really quite aware of the failings of human evidence, of the possibilities of deception, fraud and error. Her theologians, too, perfectly realize that it is often extremely hard to discriminate objective and subjective energy, as her rules for the testing of alleged miraculous events show quite plainly. Yet I would venture to assert that not one out of every ten of her psychologist opponents has ever heard of much less read, the very sensible and shrewd directions on these very points, laid down by Benedict XIV.

And if, finally, it could possibly be shown that the modern psychological theories are correct, and that these abnormal phenomena were after all, produced by hitherto unknown powers in human nature, there would still remain for discussion the very grave question as why it was that religion managed to control these powers when every scientific attempt to do so lamentably failed; why it is that even to-day "religious suggestion" can accomplish what ordinary suggestion, even under hypnotism, cannot; and how it is that certain undisputed facts brought about at Lourdes can only partly be paralleled, certainly not equaled, by all the psychological experimenters in the world. Allow, even for the sake of argument, that the childlike and pathetic faith in nature, as shown by so many infidel doctors in the face of these problems, will one day be justified, and that all the cures of Lourdes will be capable of classification under the convenient term of "law," yet even so, how is it that these doctors cannot, even now, reproduce the conditions of that "law" and the consequent cures? It is surely very remarkable that in this instance, as in so many other things hidden from the "wise and prudent" are revealed to "babes;" and that the rulers and representatives of the "dark ages" managed, and manage, somehow or another, to control and use forces of which the present century of light and learning has only just discovered the existence.

Now, the facts mentioned are surely suggestive, not necessarily of the truth of the Catholic religion, but of the extreme likelihood that that religion, and not a benevolent Pantheism or Immanentism, is to form the faith of the future. Here is a religious society which is not only up to the present the one single religious force that can really control and unite the masses, but also the one single religious body with clear dogmatic principles which can attract at any rate a considerable selection of the most advanced and cultivated thinkers of the age. It is the easiest thing in the world to become an Individualist; it is always easy to believe in the practical infallibility of one's self; one only requires the simple equipment of a sufficiently resolute contempt of one's neighbor; but it is not very easy to believe in the infallibility of someone else. That requires humility, at least intellectual. The craving for an external authority is not, in spite of a popular and shallow opinion to the contrary, nearly so natural to man as a firm reliance upon his own. Yet here the fact remains of this continuous stream of converts who through their education and attainments surely should be tempted, if any were tempted, to remain in the pleasant Paradise of Individualism and Personal Popery.

Next, there is the consideration of the undoubted tendency of academic minds to be blind to all data except those which fall under the particular science to which they have devoted themselves; faced by the very sensible and Catholic way of treating man as a feeling as well as a thinking animal, and of taking into account in the study of truth, not only matters of dry intellect, but those departments of knowledge to which access can only be gained by the heart. Thirdly, we glanced at the extraordinary vindication that Catholic experience has received, at least with regard to facts, from the most modern of all modern sciences.—Mgr. H. Benson in Atlantic Monthly.

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE PRESS

Unfortunately, the daily press is fast acquiring the habit of describing violations of the moral law with a crudity that is simply revolting. But when we are presented with whole columns of reports of the erotic slobberings of an avowed and unblushing adulteress, who talks about her emotions, her ambition to solve the "sex problem," her associations with every chance comer, her future prospects of livelihood, etc., we ask in amazement whether the reporters who gathered this vile stuff, and the editors who sent it to the printer, have wives and mothers and sisters and daughters? Will they be gratified when they see them absorbing this deadly poison? The papers that contain this horrible interview are piled up on every breakfast-table in the land and are devoured on the cars by old men and old women and by girls and boys, with an avidity which, for any one who gives it a thought, is full of menace for all the decencies of life.

We try to stop the cholera at Swimburne Island; we spend millions on sweeping and flushing the streets to keep off disease; we have gone stark mad about disinfectants in everything we use, but here we are bringing into the sacred precints of every home in the land, or, rather, into every heart of the land, the most deadly kind of moral infection. There are crowds of decent, upright young fellows who are earning their living reporting for the press, there are editors in every department of the great journals whose lives are pure and whose first instincts are for what is right and proper. Why can they not come together to protest against and to prevent this criminal misuse of the great powers of the press, whose purpose ought to be to purify and preserve the people, and not to drag them down into a condition of mind and heart which must inevitably bring disaster on the nation?—America.

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THE FIRST SOCIAL REFORMER

There can be no gainsaying the statement that Christ is the greatest and most successful teacher the world has ever seen. His success has not been by any means complete; but this is not due to any deficiency in His principles or vagueness in His outlook upon life, but to the defection of His followers, or their half-hearted adoption of the fundamental maxims He has laid down for our guidance.

The office of carrying on the social work initiated by Christ fell by Divine appointment to the Church; and from the earliest times even during the anxious years of persecution, the social regeneration planned by Christ was progressing. From the first the poor, the sick, the children, the slave, were the objects of tender and loving care. Personal service was gladly rendered to all in need as to a renewed embodiment of the person of Christ. The entire ground plan of the social changes which are demanded in our time was already traced in lines of light by enthusiastic disciples and their immediate followers. Men were brothers (even more than "comrades"); men were "other Christs," not merely "citizens" or men. Aid was systematised, it dealt with groups, it was to-day we have come to describe as social work—the name being now indeed, but the thing denoted as old as Christianity. Nay, Christianity is not merely a social power—it is the creator of all that is best in society, of its forms, its ideals, its language, its traditions, its name.—Msgr. Parkinson, D. D.

GERMAN EMPEROR

RECOGNIZES THE HOLY FATHER AS A SOVEREIGN

Apropos of the recent decision of the French Court of Cassation that it is a crime to display the Papal banner as the flag of a sovereign, the following note is interesting:

"On the occasion of the jubilee of the Pope the Emperor of Germany sent to Rome as Ambassador Extraordinary the General Baron Loe, who, addressing His Holiness, said: 'I pray your Holiness to accept these gifts as proof of friendship from sovereign to sovereign.' Some Italian newspapers tried to minimize the act and the words of the Ambassador as devoid of political significance, whereupon the German Government issued the following official note: 'Germany approached the Pope principally because he is King, recognized as such by the Prussian Government, which has accredited an Ambassador near his sacred person. The Emperor approached the Pope as a sovereign, a dignity that history and the laws of nations recognize in him for centuries.'"

How to Treat a Catholic Paper

"Treat your Catholic paper considerately and courteously," says the Catholic Citizen. "Treat it as a good friend whom you would favor if you could; and whose good opinion you wish to retain.

"If there is ever a doubt in your mind, give your friend the benefit of the doubt.

"Regard your Catholic paper as a co-worker in the cause. It holds up the flag of the faith. See that the standard bearer is supported.

"When you do business with the Catholic paper, try to do it pleasantly, cheerfully and with kind words.

"Above all—and this is the best courtesy—do business according to the business rules which the Catholic paper requests you to follow. Be sure that, if you comply there will never be any misunderstanding."—New World.

LORD HALSBURY.— Another subscriber sends us further intelligence in regard to Lord Halsbury, he of unlovely ancestry. John Gifford, Lord Halsbury's grandfather, contended that Henry Grattan was not competent to vote at an election in 1802. This brought the following reference to Gifford's character from the great Irish Tribune: "The objection comes from the hired traducer of his country, the excommunicated of his fellow-citizens, the unprincipled ruffian, the bigoted agitator, the regal rebel; in the city a fire-brand, in the court a liar, in the street a bully, and in the field a coward."

READER.—We do not undertake the responsibility of guaranteeing the soundness of all business propositions which we advertise. We take care, however, not to publish anything in our advertising columns of a suspicious character. We would recommend Reader to send for the advertising matter of the concern to which he refers and judge for himself.

DIED

GOODROW.—At Hamilton, Ont., on Sept. 18, 1911, Mrs. Goodrow, beloved wife of Geo. Goodrow, Insurance agent, aged forty-four years. May her soul rest in peace!

There are many roads through life; there is only one road that the wise person will take and keep. That one is the road to righteousness. And righteousness, in terms of man's existence in this world, is right living, right thinking, right doing.

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The Transfer Books will be closed from the 17th to 31st August, both days inclusive.

By Order of the Board,
JAMES MASON,
General Manager

Toronto, July 19th, 1911

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FAVORS RECEIVED.—Mrs. D. C. and family wish to return thanks to the Sacred Heart, Blessed Virgin and St. Anne for favors received.

Miss C. C. wishes to return thanks to the Sacred Heart and St. Anne for favors received.

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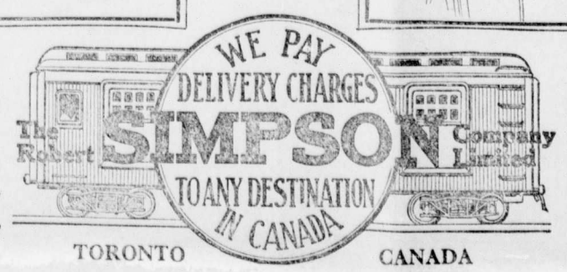

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