

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND SCIENCE.

A GREAT ADDRESS BY CARDINAL MORAN
ON A GREAT SUBJECT.

THE Cardinal-Archbishop of Sydney, who was 'the speaker' at St. John's College annual commemoration, delivered a powerful, instructive, and convincing address. His Eminence (says the Sydney *Breeman*) selected as his subject, 'The Catholic Church and Modern Scientific Research.'

In the warfare of irreligion against Divine Truth (said his Eminence), it is an accusation as old as the hills that the Catholic Church is the irreconcilable enemy of knowledge and that she pursues scientific progress with an implacable hatred. And yet it is difficult to conceive an accusation more wholly devoid of any pretence to justify it (hear, hear). The discoveries of science bring joy to the Church. Every triumph achieved in the paths of progress and enlightenment adds lustre to her diadem of truth. The Church is the heavenly-appointed custodian of the doctrines of Divine Truth. Heresies never cease to attempt to corrupt her teachings, and vainly-devised theories of pretentious men aim at her overthrow. But what does experience teach us to be the result? All the assaults against her have only served to bring her invincible armoury into bolder relief, and to array with new aureolas of victory the truths which she defends (applause).

Half a century ago Cardinal Newman made this remark in regard to the attacks of heresy. Such attacks, he said, may be prolonged; there may be effort, hesitation, suspense, swaying to the right and to the left, yet Divine Truth marches onward 'with what certainty of advance, with what precision in its march, with what ultimate completeness, part answering to part, one, absolute, integral, indissoluble, while the whole lasts,' and finally the inner beauty of the truth that was assailed is presented to the world in the adornment of fresh forms 'with an exuberance which exceeded all questionings, and a harmony which baffled all criticism.'

BASELESS IRRELIGIOUS THEORIES.

The result has been the same as often as pretentious theories under the name of science have been advanced against the teaching of the Church. 'No sight can be more grateful to a true theologian (writes Father Faber) than to behold the giant strides of scientific discovery and the bold methods of scientific research. He has nothing to fear for his faith, except an embarrassment arising from the very riches of its demonstration which these discoveries are continually supplying. Nothing can be more narrow, vulgar, or stupid than the idea of an antithesis between science and religion. It is true that some of the sciences, in the earlier periods of their construction, turned the heads of those who drank at their fountains, and crude theories, incompatible with the dogmas of faith, were the result. Yet, these only changed, at last, to fresh and more striking proofs of the Divine and unalterable truth of Divine faith; for further discovery and a larger induction led, in every case, to an abandonment of the irreligious theory.'

Hence it is that the Chief Pastors of the Church, and none more so than the present illustrious successor of St. Peter, Pope Leo the Thirteenth, have never ceased to exhort her children to cultivate the higher studies, and to pursue perseveringly the paths of true science. Looking back upon this century now hastening to a close, we see innumerable names of devoted men, in the ranks alike of the clergy and of the laity, who though fervently attached to the doctrines and practices of the Catholic Church, yet earnestly and untiringly cultivated every branch of science. With the sanction and blessing of religion they pursued their labours and won the peerless reputation which they now enjoy. Their brilliant achievements in the pursuit of knowledge, no less than their manner of life, have added to the glory of the Church, and shall long remain an unanswerable vindication of her attitude towards enlightenment and scientific truth.

If we now review the course of warfare against revealed truth pursued by the leaders of infidelity, we cannot fail to be struck by the inevitable fate of overthrow and decay that has befallen their various theories. In the last century Voltaire and the Encyclopedists may be said to have captivated for awhile the fashionable opinion of the literary world, and to have ruled supreme amid the corruption that then prevailed in the courts of Europe, and in many of the higher centres of learning. Nevertheless, at the present day the most embittered enemies of religion treat with disdain their sophistry, and fling aside with contempt the vain theories which they so idolised. M. Renan may be said to have pronounced the common verdict of modern rationalism when he wrote that Voltairianism was 'out of date.'

THE HUMAN FAMILY AND THE DELUGE.

I may illustrate by an example what is implied by this 'out of date' verdict. Attention was called in those days to the vast deposits of shells which were found on some of the Alpine hills. Voltaire and his school, through dread that such a fact might be interpreted to favour the Catholic belief in the deluge, contended that such shells were mere '*lusus nature*,' freaks of nature, in which the versatile hand and skilful genius of mother earth were shown forth. Such an explanation was received with well-deserved ridicule on every side, but Voltaire and his school had another theory ready at hand. Those shells they said, were brought by the crusaders and pilgrims from the Holy Land, and were flung aside when those visitors to distant shores parted company returning to their homes. Strange it is that so ridiculous a theory would have found favour with men who pretended a claim to enlightenment and scientific attainments. We will not be surprised, however, that even the assailants of the Church would now-a-days pronounce it 'out of date.' Too much is now known of the crusaders' history to suppose them in their homeward route to be grouped in their thousands, on the summit of Mount Ceniz, to fling away the pilgrim-

shells which they so prized. Too much is also known of the deposits of shells. They have been found on the Rocky Mountains and the Andes, and, last, not least, even on our New Zealand ranges. The man would be 'out of date' indeed who could suppose that these mountains were the theatre of the crusaders' meetings when returning to their homes.

We may take another instance from the complete revulsion of scientific opinion in regard to a favourite axiom of infidelity, which results from the theory of the uniformity of nature now so fashionable among some leading scientists. Voltaire and his disciples looked upon it as an unquestionable principle that the human race could not be derived from a common stock. You have only to open your eyes, he used to say, to see the diversity of men from men, and he heaped ridicule upon those who would allow of less than half-a-dozen human races wholly distinct in origin and stock. There were indeed many arguments at hand—the very organisation of the human frame, the unity of languages, the uniformity of traditions to refute this belated theory. Humboldt many years ago could truly write: 'The ancient legends of the human race, which we find dispersed throughout the whole world like the fragments of a great shipwreck, are of the deepest interest to the philosophical inquirer into the history of mankind. Like certain families of plants which preserve the type of a common ancestry in spite of the influences of height and the differences of climate, the cosmogonic traditions of nations everywhere display a similarity of form and feature which move us to admiration.' But it was reserved for the scientists of the present day to proclaim aloud that the old infidel theory was quite 'out of date.' They have quite gone around to the opposite point of the compass, and now it has become quite fashionable to assert the uniformity of nature, and many will push this so far as to persuade us of the unity of stock, not of the human race alone, but of all animated nature. A representative of our modern scientists has not hesitated to proclaim this discovery to be the grandest achievement of modern science.

OUT-OF-DATE ARGUMENTS.

But if, by the verdict of present-day science, the arguments arrayed against Divine Truth in the last century are thus branded 'out of date,' a no less disastrous fate may be said to have befallen the countless theories which in the present scientific age have been devised in a spirit of irreligion and in hostility to the Catholic Church. Cardinal Wiseman, in his *Science and Revealed Religion*, writes that 'from the time of Buffon, system rose beside system, like the moving pillars of the desert, advancing in threatening array; but like them they were fabrics of sand; and though in 1806 the French Institute could count more than 80 such theories hostile to Scripture, not one of them has held its ground or deserves to be recorded.' Since 1806 those baseless irreligious theories have been multiplied a hundredfold, but one of the leading organs of the present-day scientist school not long ago plainly avowed that the teachers of infidelity had exhausted their resources, and that nothing but 'bankruptcy' remained for them (applause).

The Right Hon. Arthur Balfour, in his address at the Manchester Congress in 1888, suggested that a refutation of the scientist assailants of religion might be framed almost in their own words: 'We might begin,' he said, 'by showing how crude and contradictory are the notions of primitive man, and even of cultivated man in his unreflective moments, respecting the object-matter of scientific beliefs. We might then turn to the scientific apologists. We should show how the authorities of one age differed from those of another in their treatment of the subject, and how the authorities of the same age differed among themselves; then we should comment on the strange obstinacy they evinced in adhering to their conclusions, whether they could prove them or not. Without attributing motives to individuals, we should hint politely, but not obscurely, that prejudice and education in some, the fear of differing from the majority, or the fear of losing a lucrative place in others, had been allowed to warp the impartial course of investigation; and we should lament that scientific philosophers, in many respects so amiable and useful a body of men, should allow themselves so often to violate principles which they openly and ostentatiously avowed.'

PRESENT ATTITUDE OF THE SCIENTIFIC WORLD.

One of the scientific periodicals of England, in February, 1895, called attention to the singular change thus effected in public opinion in relation to the irreligious theories that once were so popular and fashionable; 'One of the most significant signs of the times is the change of attitude among scientists towards religious questions. Those who keep pace with scientific thought, and are familiar with the atmosphere and spirit of scientific investigation in the universities abroad, have been struck by the radical change which has taken place in the last 20 years. What now strikes one in the attitude and spirit of a great many scientific men, is a spirit of reverence towards the religious side of life. . . . It is very generally felt that the explanations of religious phenomena offered 20 years ago, and accepted at the moment as final, are inadequate; that religion is something deeper, more pervasive, and more influential than many scientific men took account of two decades ago.'

I will only add the words of an American review which a few months ago thus sketched the present attitude of the scientific world in regard to Divine Truth: 'Hundreds of objections loudly trumpeted for a time have been effectively silenced. Destructive theories after a short period of popularity have gradually faded out of sight. Statements put forth at first with unbounded confidence have quietly been dropped, and are no longer heard of. Much had been made of the silence of antiquity around Jewish history. But that silence is broken. From the hidden monuments of Egypt, of Assyria, and Chaldea, voices have come forth so significant that the main lines of our Sacred History are now admitted by all to be true.'

(To be continued.)