

# THE PROSPECTS OF CATHOLICISM<sup>1</sup>

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"I persist in thinking that the prevailing form for the Christianity of the future will be the form of Catholicism."—  
MATTHEW ARNOLD.

MUCH has been lately written from a hostile point of view on the methods, aims, and actual working of the Catholic Church. It is always possible — and, I suppose, always will be—to set forth in a dazzling light the reasons why Englishmen who loved their freedom, and men of science who remembered Galileo, should have refused to bend the knee before Popes and Congregations; yet when the worst has been uttered, a student of history will be tempted to say in arrest of judgement: "Tarry a little, there is something else." Forces or elements in the past; necessary demands of more than one sort in the present; social, artistic, religious motives on a very great scale, forbid us to imagine that the epitaph of Catholicism will be written during the twentieth

<sup>1</sup> Reprinted by permission of Editor and Publisher, from the *National Review* for October, 1901.

century. It is still among the mightiest of this world's kingdoms, and its borders have been widely extended since the French Revolution threatened to make an end of it altogether.

I wish to estimate some of the causes in virtue of which it is destined not simply to survive but to flourish, and perhaps to rule, in a social state democratic by constitution, tolerant of all beliefs and unbeliefs by law, scientific in its great processes of industry, and subject to rapid developments, or crises, in its daily life. What we perceive at a first glance is eminently unfavourable to the Catholic Church ; but, as we see at a second, not to that Church alone. The art and mystery of religion, whether as a profession or a creed, have come into such peril as never perhaps was since Europe accepted the Christian teaching. Dogma is fading from men's minds ; an apostasy from long-cherished ideals, marked by blank indifference to all preaching and the emptying of churches on Sunday, is noticeable in every large city on every continent. Women hold by religion ; men to an enormous extent do not. The ranks of the clergy are thinning. It is no longer a way of life which leads to renown or holds out prizes tempting enough to draw the most intellectual or vigorous of the rising generation ; and doubt on the one hand, a lack of prestige on the other, diminish the attraction it formerly exercised when the Church governed in partnership with the State. We are entering on a period of intense and convinced, yet largely unconscious, Secularism.

By Secularism I mean Atheism in practice. It is much easier to forget God than to deny His existence ; and these millions have forgotten or never knew Him. Their guide and philosopher is the

social condition in which they were brought up ; for they do not reason, they simply imitate. Quite unaware that their unbelief has all the momentum in it of an active disbelief, they would be astonished if they could see themselves in the looking-glass of modern philosophy, which yet might be their salvation. Such a looking-glass, clear and level, has been held up to the century by Professor Haeckel of Jena, in his *Riddle of the Universe*, a book worth reading because it proclaims with absolute frankness the secret many others would fold in silk and samite, of a doctrine by no means rare and probably on the increase.<sup>1</sup> Professor Haeckel assures us that religion has, at last, received its deathstroke from "science." To sum up his conclusions without appearing rhetorical, is difficult ; and rhetoric, on these solemn subjects, will sound hollow. But this much may be said. The Professor declares that, like Frederick II. of Prussia, he is a confirmed "atheist and thanatist" ; to his thinking, Nature has been proved to be a scheme of blind energies, of ceaseless transmutations, with no intellect guiding them, which proceed from zero to zero and back again. Providence is a myth. All things come to pass, indeed, by fixed mechanical necessity, or, as Goethe sings in oracular stanzas, by "great iron laws," but still without purpose or design, and thus strictly by chance. There is no substance called soul ; consciousness, a transient phenomenon, perishes with the body ; belief in existence beyond the grave is a superstition. When death arrives all is over. In one word, the old ideals have become incredible as any fiction of Greeks or Hindoos. Their day is done.

<sup>1</sup> *The Riddle of the Universe*. By Ernest Haeckel. English Translation. London : Watts & Co.

Were this frightful picture offered to thousands of modern men as their portrait, I do not see how they could fairly question its accuracy. "Atheists and thanatists" they are, without God in this world or hope in any other. But they would resent the sudden illumination. They do not want to know their own minds. When M. Brunetière, taking this philosophy at its own valuation, defined it as "the bankruptcy of science," there was a loud outcry from the very school of which Professor Haeckel is a leading light. Yet surely, if science can teach no more than we learn from *The Riddle of the Universe*, bankrupt it is to the last farthing. A more absolute negative was never declared. It is the *tabula rasa* of religion, ethics, history, tradition, aspiration. No God, no soul, no conscience, no Hereafter—could any system approach nearer to the term we have called zero? It sweeps away all principles to let loose all instincts. "But," returns the Professor, "it leaves the social instinct, which is morality." The social instinct of brutes, combining to kill and eat their feebler brethren! Or the instinct of apes with their five senses aflame! The war of all against all, which a clearer-sighted man than Professor Haeckel, the atheist Hobbes, could reduce to civilized peace only by means of his *Leviathan*, omnipotent tyranny! Such are the dangers of an immoral and irreligious negation; dangers most real and pressing, as the omens warn us, in London and in Paris, in New York and in Berlin, and wherever society has allowed certain safeguards to be weakened in the rush of competitive commerce or as a homage to the claims of overweening "science." For, it cannot be denied, the ethics which found themselves on a mere social instinct lead directly to the worship of wealth and

pleasure ; they abolish the Categorical Imperative and know not how to forbid with authority passions and desires that had better not be named here. Every lapse in thought from the Christian standard spells degradation for multitudes. But it spells misery too. The experiment of life, reduced to a play of molecular forces, does not correspond to the nature of things ; it is a dream upon which reality is always breaking in, and the dreamer cannot sleep in peace.

Hence the innumerable nightmares which weigh upon modern cities ; and the more advanced their condition, so much the more do they breed these unpleasant phenomena. The American prides himself on his smartness ; but it is in his busiest marketplace that spiritism, faith-healing, and impostures wilder than these, flourish exceedingly. In Paris of late years every conceivable superstition has found a home. Among ourselves, the temper which welcomed Neo-Buddhism is not extinct, and ridicule fails to kill the varieties of occult science. An unwholesome mysticism spreads like a fungus over much recent literature ; it will continue to spread so long as Professor Haeckel's unbelief darkens the sky. Let it be granted that there is an eclipse of faith ; who will expect from the abyss of nescience to see a fresh dawn travelling up towards the zenith ? These are tokens, not of health, but of a disease which is too deeply seated for the stethoscope or scalpel of crude Materialism to reach it, still less to contribute towards its removal.

Anarchy in thought, licence in conduct, severe opposition of class interests, and a growing melancholy which betrays itself in the shape of insanity or even suicide, cannot be deemed evidence either of

truth conquering falsehood, or of progress moving on to a higher civilization. We all go by our own experience, and few things have struck me more forcibly than the lack of discipline, the breaking up of character into uncertain impulse, which result from a hearty acceptance of teaching like Professor Haeckel's. When I compare it with the *Exercises* of St. Ignatius Loyola, it reads like the uncreating word which brings back chaos and repeals Divine Law. Thousands of years ago its fatal formula was discovered, "Nothing is true, everything is permitted." For observe, there can be no inviolable right where appetite is the rule and sanction of conduct. And what is the "social instinct" but appetite? To make a god of society was the Comtist delusion. It has not gained in persuasiveness since Nietzsche called humanity a herd—which truly they would be, and nothing more, did we not view them in the light of an ethics founded on eternal justice and appealing to self-evident intuitions of right and wrong. For want of such an acknowledged and objective standard, we are menaced by a fresh outbreak of barbarism, not from beneath but from above. We shall do well to bear in mind always that it was the French nobles, rather than the French people, who pulled down the oldest monarchy in Europe and made 1793 inevitable.

Society is in danger, and the disciples of an unbelieving science threaten it with destruction. However we regard the Christian creed, is it not manifest that its total disappearance, nay, its effective relegation to a secondary and private rank, would produce changes in the social order as great as must ensue in the physical were the moon to lose

its power over the tides? Greater indeed, for the elements thus unchained would be antagonists by nature; avarice, envy, lust, ambition, all conscious that their time was short, and that no Day of Judgment would follow. How avert so tremendous a catastrophe? That is the question which rises to our lips on hearing of Socialist propaganda, Anarchist assassinations, free-will denied in the name of knowledge, virtue resolved into selfishness, and immortality derided as an impossible fiction.<sup>1</sup> The Christian dogmas have been hitherto real and operative beliefs. Take them away, and an immense vacuum is created, into the depths of which our ancient world must fall headlong, since by Christianity it was built and sustained. What, then, ought to be done in the brief period which may yet be allowed us to withstand the secularist triumph?

Men whose character deserves sincere respect have answered, "Let us turn back to the New Testament and preach the Christianity of Christ." I say so too; but I cannot persuade myself that a living order of things is to be deduced from the pages of a book; or that an abstract Christ, the creation of literature, is really more than a phantom. The experiment of teaching religion from a book alone has been tried, and has ended in disaster. We are looking on, in grief or exultation, at what has been truly called the "passing of Protestantism." Private judgement exercised on the Bible is dissolving it apace, and may be reckoned among the chief causes of our present discontents. When the Puritan gives up his Bible, nay, when he begins to doubt of it, the ground on which he stands is shaken

<sup>1</sup> This sentence was written a few hours before the assassination of President McKinley.

with earthquake, his religion leaves him, and he turns for comfort to making money on principles which it is hard to distinguish from the lowest form of Positivism. The Christ of the Gospel vanishes; Mammon reigns in His stead. Is not that the lugubrious chronicle of New England? Puritan, Unitarian, Universalist—then company-promoting and Wall Street as Jerusalem the Golden! It may be difficult, as one considers these things, not to fall into satire; but satire will not help us towards the spiritual restoration of which we are in search.

Any power that aims at the revival of Christian faith under modern conditions must be independent, world-wide, supernatural, and in its general effect miraculous. From a merely human level it cannot raise mankind out of the slough into which Atheism has betrayed it. No department of State will be equal to such a task, for the State is this fallen society and itself needs redemption. Private effort is laudable at all times; any association which has retained even a fragment of true Christianity will, thus far, be telling in the good cause; but there is only one Church in contact with European and American society which fulfils the conditions required. Independent, supernatural, miraculous—these high epithets have belonged from of old to the Catholic Church, and are hers to-day. She does not preach an abstract or merely historical Saviour; she has never simply relied on a written record; and while she treats with kingdoms and republics as a power of this world, she deals directly with the individual as an ambassador from the next. In one point of view she is accessible to touch and sight; in another she is ideal, spiritual, transcendental. And she fills every period of Christian history with



her achievements, her sufferings, and her victorious resistance to hostile powers.

I am endeavouring to get at the facts, not to palm off on credulous readers (if any such were in the twentieth century) a partisan argument. To clear the ground, I should be prepared, at this stage, to distinguish between Catholicism as a creed and Catholicism as a system, unreal as the distinction seems to me. I will eschew ecclesiastical politics, which, though they fill the "religious" newspapers, are not religion. For reasons which lie on the surface it is natural, but singularly misleading, in this country, to look at the Catholic Movement as an assault on English freedom, and we are treated to quotations from *King John*, or references to the Armada, when we should be considering far deeper problems. In our modern world, Religion is not, as it was in the sixteenth century, an affair of State so much as an affair of the heart. Men follow their taste, or liking, or conscience, when they worship; their beliefs are akin not to party politics, but to their preferences in literature, in friendship, in that portion of their lives which is most under their control and is a matter of choice. Religion is, therefore, something intimate and deeply personal to each; and while politicians stand on their guard against Rome, or statisticians are showing from figures that Catholicism makes no headway, a silent revolution may be moving onward to results no less unexpected than momentous.

Let me give my conclusion in a nutshell. Cardinal Newman, reading history on evidence without straining it, has written that the Pope must, at all events, be recognized as "heir by default" of antiquity. The expression gave some little offence

to certain of his critics, who did not perceive that he took the lowest ground because it was unassailable. In a like spirit, and that I may come to close quarters with my argument, I will say that Catholicism is "heir by default" of primitive Christianity. Though it were true that, on paper, we could trace a system more resembling the organization of which we enjoy glimpses up and down the New Testament than the existing Roman Church, as a matter of fact no such scheme is anywhere visible, or ever was. Strike out Catholic dogma from the ages; imagine the Catholic hierarchy a fiction; and what is left? East answers West that nothing is left. In the concrete, as a religion accepted, acted upon, by nations, and larger than a mere sect or school, the Christian Religion has always been Catholic and is so at the present day. All modern Churches are fragments hurled forth, or broken off, from a centre at which the ancient Faith is still as refulgent as ever. And they remain Christian simply in so far as they keep what they have inherited. Survey them all, from the Anglican on the Extreme Right to the Unitarian or Universalist on the Extreme Left; what have they to call Christian which they have not received from Rome? Christ Himself, the Bible, the sacred ordinances, the creeds,—all were brought to Western Europe and taken thence to America from this single source. Historically, creed and system are not to be divided. Rome is the Mother, as she was during centuries the Mistress, of all the Churches with which we have any concern.

But this, it may be retorted, was an accident; it is ancient history; and now the Churches are independent of Rome. Then, I ask, do they keep the creeds intact? Is the certified Christian dogma which

alone, in history, can be deemed genuine and authentic, safe with them? Are they, or are they not, everywhere breaking down into a Unitarian distrust of the miraculous, and tending to substitute a purely human Christ for the Only Begotten Son of God? The suggestion I make, in no mood of controversy but the opposite, is that in all religious bodies outside Rome great changes are taking place which may rend them asunder, dividing between orthodox and heterodox, and at last between spiritual and secular, in obedience to forces that cannot be reconciled. If they hold by the Faith once delivered, they will approach nearer and nearer to the Roman spirit, and in time to the Roman system. If they suffer the Faith to be resolved and melted down, through stages of what we have termed "Naturalism," until it becomes a form of monistic self-contemplation, they will prove in the clearest way that Rome is, and has never ceased to be, the corner stone of Christian beliefs. I do not know a more serious argument for all who wish to be orthodox, than this appeal to the course of history. Is there, I repeat, any solid ground between Rome and Secularism on which disciples of the New Testament can take their stand?

There was, so millions were taught, before the widespread movement of the last century, which has dealt such fatal blows to Protestant Christians. But now we are seeing, ever more distinctly, that the Reformation, as a constructive effort, has failed. Take its three great forms, personified in Luther the mystic, Calvin the legislator, and Socinus the rationalist. Of Lutheranism not a screed is left; the man towers up yet as a revolting Titan, the rocks which he flung against Olympus have fallen back on the soil, and are dead ashes, vitrified lava. Calvin

has been pictured by his own descendants as a "ghost gone shrieking down the wind"; his writings are credible now to none of us, and his dark theology is made an excuse for believing in no Deity at all. Socinus, where is he? In a sense, everywhere; but logic, working out his principles to their legitimate conclusion, shows them to be the sum of all heresies and the end of dogma. Thus, if we still desire to believe after any intelligible fashion in the Christ whom our fathers worshipped, we must come back to Revelation as untouched by the Reformers. They have played their part and gone their way.

Many thousands every year join the Roman Church from a conviction that it is what an illustrious German Catholic defined it to be, "the objective historical faith of Christ." Many more, among Frenchmen or Italians, who had given it up in their stormy youth, return to it on similar grounds, as M. Bourget tells us in the remarkable prologues which he is putting forth to his collected volumes. Others, like M. Brunetière, moved by social considerations and alarmed at the chaos which they see around them, take the way to Rome as their only chance of salvation. The witness of men like M. Taine, who do not actually join the Church, is if possible more significant still. These declare that the "old Gospel" is necessary now in a degree altogether unprecedented, as a dyke against the coming barbarians. But when we ask them what they understand by the "old Gospel" it turns out to be the Catholic version, not Calvin, not Luther, but "poverty, chastity, and obedience," sanctified by the example of Christ and the medieval or modern Saints. Who, on the other hand, dreams of taking on himself the yoke of the Augsburg or the Westminster Confession?

Where is now that immeasurable Protestant divinity which once sounded from every pulpit in Northern Christendom? It may be discussed in libraries by certain politic worms; it has died off the lips and out of the hearts of ministers, pledged by every solemn engagement to maintain it. Even the Atonement, that primary article, is passed over in a silence not ambiguous by candidates for ordination, and Pelagius dictates the sermon from the pages of Emerson or Carlyle. Of these things the natural, though commonly tacit, inference is a surrender of dogma to the Unitarian.

So far, then, as the historical Christian faith is concerned, the reformers have ended, not mended, it. Their ordinances have been resolved into preaching, preaching into doubt, doubt into a worship of Nature. Professor Haeckel, in his unceremonious manner, terms this middle stage "pseudo-Christianity," and I fear this addition, harsh as it sounds, can scarcely be refuted. Viewing the strict Protestant theology from first to last, we perceive it as a dissolving process, in which the three great objects of primitive belief—Church, Bible, and Redeemer—have been successively explained away.

The Catholic Church has gained at its expense. Four centuries—a long chapter in the world's history—prove that Rome, however charged with corruption, keeps the heart of religion still beating. The Gospel that she received she preaches yet. Her faithful are orthodox Christians, while the rebels, as she foretold them, who separated from her in that name, have shorn it of divinity, and—strange paradox!—are indignant with her because she insists that the Bible is truly God's Word and Jesus of Nazareth His Son. Her faith has not changed, and its permanence

is the measure of their defection. If Luther or Calvin could have foreseen this state of things when they broke away, would it not have left them dumb with amazement? And, observe, the more it is urged that Roman officials are, or have been, a scandal to their high calling; that genius is not to be found in Catholic apologists, or insight and ability among bishops and clergy; so much the more conclusive is our argument in favour of a secret Divine influence which would not suffer its purpose to be undone by such weak and needy instruments.

For it is not by the inertia of dead custom, but amid warfare without ceasing, that Catholic dogma has been preserved against Jansenists, philosophers, revolutionaries, and the terrific onslaught of atheistic science. No man will pretend that the Church has folded her arms and turned aside from battle. "Doomed to death, but fated not to die," she has brought down into this new century her creed and practice, the same in all essentials, and even in language, that we may study in the pages of Tertullian or Cyprian; in brief, she is antiquity, which cannot be laid away in a tomb, but is living an immortal life, as much at home in Chicago or San Francisco as it was in Alexandria or in the Rome of the Cæsars.

This Church, let it never be forgotten, fills the whole Christian time, is its central fact, and yet shows no sign of decrepitude. It is the one cosmopolitan power on earth; and if Christ came to establish a visible kingdom, this must be its head and front. Dogma within, discipline without; a Divine ritual binding them together; certainly nothing so wonderful, no polity so mysterious, can be adduced in comparison from any age or civilization. And for

the last hundred years this unparalleled system has stood upon free and public suffrage ; it is the largest voluntary association ever beheld, yet more intimately connected in head and members than when the Pope disposed of Europe as its sovereign lord.

To exhaust these considerations is not easy, nor can it be requisite. I pass on to the goal to which they point. Seeing that we live in times of a widespread falling away from the ideas and laws by which men professed to govern their conduct until yesterday, it is natural for a religious spirit to inquire if the battle is lost and Christianity doomed. He musters in thought what remains of its fighting squadrons. The banners of Luther and Calvin float on the breeze, but over a deserted camp. Confusion reigns in the once serried lines of Protestantism, which, instead of defending the Bible, are tearing its text to pieces, denying its authority, and scattering its leaves among the Korans, Upanishads, and Avestas of mere Eastern speculations. A Unitarian blight has fallen on the very belief in Christ ; He is no longer the sure refuge from doubt and trouble, but Himself the storm-centre of controversy and a sign to be contradicted. Nor does it appear that the captains of the host are more confident than the rank and file. Much talk has suddenly sprung up about "the Church"—ministers, it is said, may be perplexed, but "the Church" holds an unchanging creed. If so, why does she not produce it and calm the minds of her ministers? And what is this "Church"? Is she infallible or indefectible, that she should advance her high pretensions where private judgement was the cry? How will she establish her claim? On the Bible? Then we have got into a magic ring and seem to be prisoners of

a sophism. Until the net is broken, effective warfare against unbelief cannot be resumed.

That Presbyterians and Nonconformists should exalt the Church as endowed with some dogmatic power binding on individuals, is but one instance of a change anticipated scores of years before it happened by intelligent observers. From the religion of a Book, however sacred—from a literary, pulpit service, and a sort of Sunday diagram—the devout have been rudely awakened by the great wind of criticism which has smitten the four corners of the house together. "Bible Christianity," independent of a Divine witness outside its covers, has come to an end, and with it the Reformation. But the religious man hears on all sides of a "Church" which was once the emptiest word in his vocabulary; now he is told of its prerogatives, its commission, its assurance against deadly error. It is a teaching Church; or, as the enemy exclaims, it is "Sacerdotalism" come to life again. Above all is it so in the English Communion, where efforts the most violent and persevering fail to arrest the march of these Catholic traditions, and Low Church and Broad Church are swept along in a movement that has never paused for seventy years. "To those who have eyes to see," wrote Anthony Froude when these things were yet beginning, "there is no more instructive symptom of the age than the tendency of Presbyterian, Independent, and even Unitarian clergy to assume a sacerdotal dress and appearance. Their fathers insisted that between laymen and ministers there was no difference but in name. The modern ministers form themselves into a caste."<sup>1</sup>

So we come round to Milton's sarcasm, "New

<sup>1</sup> Froude's *Studies*, iii. 173.



presbyter is but old priest writ large." The Church of England, especially, as De Maistre foretold in 1816, is playing her part in this extraordinary change of scene and costume. Liturgy, sacrifice, priesthood, that conception of the Christian worship and the inward life which Protestant writers cast out as medieval, as characteristic of the Dark Ages, now finds itself honoured with a pedigree from "the Fathers," who are taken to be authorities beyond appeal. The two ends of history, no longer dis-severed, make an unbroken chain. It is more and more recognized that Christianity is a fact—a world of facts—outside our fancies, and not to be evolved from any man's inner consciousness, but real as the Roman Empire was real, with its government, laws, creeds, institutions; the work of a creative spirit, distinct and ascertainable amid heretical aberrations. All its parts hang together; hence, when the Oxford Tractarians began to teach the Apostolic succession, they were warned that the logic of facts would carry them on to full-blown Popery. It has done so. One idea has brought up another; from the decent celebration of the Eucharist they have gone forward to Masses of Requiem, to Reservation, to the cultus of the Madonna, to demands for Roman orders, and to official correspondence with Leo XIII., who in the eyes of not a few is Patriarch of the West, with special claims over the Church of Canterbury. What a revolution in thought, what a change of sentiment, has the nineteenth century witnessed in sturdy Protestants, whose grandfathers called the Pope Antichrist! Rome has yielded nothing; England, as represented by thousands of its clergy and a powerful laity behind them, has granted that in the quarrel of the Reformation dogma was saved by the

Holy See, ruined by Cranmer and his confederates. On every point, it appears, Rome was in the right, except when she maintained that she could not err. Well, she has not erred, if we may believe the verdict of English High Churchmen. Whatever she has added, in their view, to the simple faith, at least she has kept it from dissolution.

Such, too, was the judgement of a famous French writer, Augustin Thierry, at the end of his long studies. "I am an historian," he said, "a tired rationalist who submits himself to the Church. I see the facts ; I perceive in history the manifest need of an authority, Divine and visible, if the life of mankind is to grow and thrive. Now, all that exists outside Christendom is of no account. And all that exists outside the Catholic Church is of no authority. The sects are nothing but an oblivion, disregard, and contempt, of history. Therefore, the Catholic Church is the authority I was looking for, and to her I yield. I believe what she teaches ; I accept her Credo."<sup>1</sup>

But more than the faith is the life, and here again religious minds will confess that Rome holds up an ideal which comes to us from the New Testament and is directly opposed to the prevailing Atheism. This has been admirably shown in a volume of "Letters," published two years ago by one, himself not a Catholic, who was profoundly aware of the truth so often overlooked, that all the complex agencies, hierarchical, monastic, or devotional, which strangers believe are parts of an ambitious secular policy, do aim, in effect, at something very different and are only means to a supernatural end.<sup>2</sup> I am

<sup>1</sup> Chauvin, *Le Père Gratry*, 364.

<sup>2</sup> See *A Reported Change in Religion*. By Onyx. London : Edward Arnold.

astonished, by the way, that pages so full of thought, so genuine in their sympathy, and so penetrating as criticism, have not attracted the attention which they deserve. Viewing the Roman Church in a variety of aspects, and letting its opponents speak their unvarnished mind, the writer throws out these pregnant suggestions, which I take to be the drift of his reasoning. First, that "at a certain psychological point, perhaps, a man can only choose between the Catholic Church and entire rejection of supernatural Christianity." Such a moment, one would say, has arrived for the Latin races in general, and is approaching faster than most of us think for the intellectual and devout in these islands, and even in America. But second, the volume reminds us that mere historical or philosophical objections to Rome miss the centre of attack, for "the Catholic Church also reasons, but it relies for victory upon prayer, that is to say, upon desire or will to win souls, a desire or will multitudinous, yet disciplined to act collectively, and skilfully directed to its end. This is the faith which moves hearts, if not mountains." And third, says that one of the correspondents from whom we are quoting, "It seemed to me that the Church centred at Rome alone—far, of course, from perfectly, but yet in some measure—realizes the idea of a Church extending itself to all countries, races, languages, and generations. Visible unity seemed to me of the essence of the Christian Church in idea, and its chief utility, so far as realized, in practice."<sup>1</sup>

In reply to these arguments, or enforcing them from a slightly different point of view, it is said by

<sup>1</sup> See *A Reported Change in Religion*, p. 161. By Onyx. London: Edward Arnold.

the man to whom they are addressed, "I find in the Church of Rome much that satisfies my reason, a strong deciding authority, a continuous and unbroken history, a far wider community with fellow human beings than any other Church can offer. . . . Like you, I think that the Catholic Church best fulfils the great ends of religion, namely, association and common worship on the widest scale, continuity, assertion of the mysteries, maintenance of the direction of the heart towards the centre." Bertram Bevor, who subscribes to these apologetics, is not unacquainted with present abuses or past scandals in the long history of Catholic ages, but he goes on to say, "Yet, like St. Peter, Rome has always shown the power to return to the true order of ideas. Like him, too, the Church of Rome has ever been saved by her profound belief in the Divine nature of Christ. She believes in that, and she believes in herself, her commission, and her destiny. Alone among Churches she claims the world as her kingdom. All this is very impressive."<sup>1</sup>

Surely it is so, and none the less that it strikes upon us unbidden, at times or in situations where the controversies of the day, their politics and personalities, seem the most remote from our meditations; perhaps when we look down from the sculptured solitudes of a great foreign cathedral like Chartres upon a land torn with revolutions, or as we contemplate the golden mosaics of St. Mark's, or listen to the fervent singing of a Catholic folk, gathered in their thousands under the soaring spires of Cologne.

We know for certain in such hours that the heart

<sup>1</sup> See *A Reported Change in Religion*, p. 163. By Onyx. London: Edward Arnold.

of Catholicism is Divine worship, addressed to the Supreme *in facie Christi Jesu*. That it is something very ancient, sublime, affecting, and powerful to change us for the better ; that it needs no proof but experience, which is within reach of all, the illiterate, the young, the outcast ; and that an astonishing harmony runs through the diversities of its operation, as if one inexhaustible anodyne had been discovered for human ills. This, at all events, is worth considering, that in every spiritual crisis the Catholic Church knows what to do, has her fit principles and methods at hand, by which to treat the malady with decision, and without embarrassment. Her confidence in her own resources is unbounded, whether she confronts a Bismarck who relies on his culture and his edicts, or undertakes to tame and civilize Australian blacks into such pieties as are possible for them. She, and she alone, has sounded human nature to the top of its compass ; she knows all its stops ; and, if we may believe our own record, she would play on them to some divine intent. For millions of us can say, and, indeed, are bound to say, that from the lips of this mighty Mother we have learned religion pure and undefiled.

When, therefore, it is asked, "What are the prospects of Catholicism?" we shall not ascertain them simply by consulting parochial figures, or by casting our lead into the residuum which is made up of lost souls, or by taking a microscopic view of prelates diplomatizing in the Curia, unless we will measure the Atlantic by its froth or its weeds. A more philosophical method is suggested by De Tocqueville as I find him quoted in the "Letters" of Onyx : "Men in our time are naturally little disposed to believe, but as soon as they feel a sentiment of religion, they

are drawn by a hidden instinct towards the ancient Church." And the conditions of modern life tend to raise that instinct, in many hearts, to an imperious desire. Not only do they long after a religion which is something else than their own fancy, but they want the peace, the support, which will bear them up under the daily growing burden of business and competition. To the few, in our time, the prizes ; to the many such a strain of anxious care as in a campaign where no armistice ever suspends the fighting, no, not for an hour. Pass from the street or the workshop into a Catholic church, and you will feel the force of that argument. It will not lose its attraction while monopolies flourish.

To say that history, art, religion, present comfort, and future hope, recommend the Catholic devotions, would almost appear to be the same as affirming that unless ideals are utterly to perish, humanity will one day pass on into a great Roman period. If some have left us only to give up the religious life altogether, and are now secularist in their philosophy, the inference for those who believe in God is that Catholicism alone can satisfy our highest aspirations. Countless numbers are indifferent, not because they have rejected the faith, but because they never knew it. What I find it impossible to suppose is that a society which was once Christian will deliberately choose to be "atheist and thanatist," to forswear the noblest beliefs, and to acknowledge nothing beyond its five senses. How long would any form of Western civilization last under these conditions ? Men and women will come back, simply because they must, to the tradition of idealism. Not to a dead Christ, but to a living and present Redeemer ; in other words, to a history which they can grasp

with their hands, and feel with their hearts, at any moment ; which is always *there* when they look up to it. This actual religion, more lively than books, however inspired, closer to us than sermons, be they as eloquent as Bossuet or Chrysostom—an atmosphere which we open our lips and breathe in—is found nowhere else than in the Catholic ritual which, be it observed, never ceases, for its centre is the Real Presence. In this everlasting Sacrament, the unknown God, if we believe, is not far from every one of us. What, in comparison with such a gift, are the petty discords, the obscurities in detail, and the human miseries, which can be paralleled in every system, but not the gift that makes them of little account? “To do it justice,” said Hawthorne, in a striking sentence, “Catholicism is such a miracle of fitness for its own ends, many of which might seem to be admirable ones, that it is difficult to imagine it a contrivance of mere man. . . . If there were but angels to work it, the system would soon vindicate the dignity and holiness of its origin.”<sup>1</sup>

Yes, and since its ministers are not angels, yet its forms bear upon them such tokens of the Supernatural, will the philosopher conclude that the dignity and holiness were invented by those too inferior demigods? Perhaps the saddest of all sights in this melancholy world is the mishandling, worse than neglect, of our Catholic treasures, our ceremonies, music, architecture, our philosophies and our devotions, by those who should watch over them as at the gate of Heaven. Reformation is always called for, now as in more scandalous times, and in no slight degree. But whether it comes soon or late, a growing number will say with Gerald Beechcroft, in

<sup>1</sup> *Transformation*, chap. xxxviii., beginning.

the volume I commend to all serious readers, "I feel that my true country is the Catholic Church centred at Rome, and that all other forms of thought and religion, however good in themselves, however good they were then for me, and however good they are now for others, were but resting-places on my journey home."