RELIGION IN FRANCE.

INTRODUCTORY.

WHAT forms does the religious sentiment take in the various provinces of France and in the various classes of the French nation? How is this sentiment satisfied by existing positive religions? These are the questions which I propose to answer in the present paper. I make no pretence to settling the matter, and the inquiry of which I shall here give the results will doubtless throw but a pale light on the religious soul of France. To the set answers obtained from my *questionnaires* I shall add the thousand and one little facts of my daily observation and reading, hoping from these sources to arrive at a tolerably exact view of the situation.

If it should be asked in what manner a religion can satisfy the religious sentiment,—that particular state of the soul which involves fear, a sense of the beautiful, phantasy, and the need of knowledge, and which is apparently compounded of all forms of desire,—we shall at once discover that dogmas and beliefs are not alone sufficient. A religion acts, and acts powerfully, through the personal quality of its ministers, through the forms of its observances, through the architecture of its churches, and the character of its ceremonies.

It would be useless to insist on the importance of the monuments and the ceremonies of the Catholic religion; the same flight of faith that gave birth to the cathedrals still inspires respect for it among us. Not one of the least causes of the disfavor with which the Reformation was received in our country was the indiscreet zeal of the Calvinists in demolishing statues and mutilating the portals of the sacred edifices; the genius of the nation felt itself

wounded in its dearest living creations. The absence of all pomp in the reformed religion and the bareness of its places of worship were also a cause of estrangement; the popular soul did not find in the new faith the spectacles which charmed it, the joyfulness of its old festivals, and the wealth of art which had become a common possession even of the suffering and unfortunate multitudes. There is a body of sentiment so deeply rooted in the Latin race that even its most indifferent representative, when contemplating the magnificent monuments of the past, cannot but feel some vestige of the ancient emotions, and his eyes still cling to their solemn grandeurs even when their religious significance would never affect him.

I believe, therefore, that I am justified in saying that the same frame of mind which led our people to oppose the reformation of Calvin still continues to estrange us from it. It must also be acknowledged that Protestantism, even though it offers some satisfaction to the reason and gives wider scope to criticism, is still in many respects inferior to Catholicism. Its artistic infertility alone is sufficient to justify this statement.¹ It was never able to renew in France the miracles of the preceding centuries. Even in the countries where it triumphed, it could only bestow upon the edifices which it occupied that appearance of "devastated churches" which so forcibly impressed French, Italian, and Spanish travellers and reawakened in them, if only for a moment, the Catholic sentiment, as they stood in the presence of that "bare and sombre religion which saddens both the eyes and the heart."² Finally, coming as late as it did, it could make no pretension to satisfying the intellect of the cultivated classes. Human reason, already exacting in its demands, clamored for more than Protestantism offered, and strong minds could not find in the new belief the complete enfranchisement for which they longed on leaving the old.

The reformed religion came, therefore, not as an alleviation,

¹ The only exception perhaps is music, and that principally among the followers of Luther. Luther possessed a warmth and feeling for art which Calvin utterly lacked.

² Emilio Castelar.

If it did not devote itself to the incessant guidance and unremitting surveillance of souls, it nevertheless placed them under severe constraint. It asked greater intellectual effort from its devotees, but it restricted this effort to its own sphere. It took from the imagination more than it granted to reason; it appeared to sacrifice the Gospel to the Bible, and the inspiration of the Greeks and Romans to that of the Jews. And for this reason it was less suited than Catholicism to the Latin nations and the Latin culture, which had remained semi-pagan, with little liking for theological discussions, more delicate and more full of life, fanatical by passion rather than by faith, and at bottom more indifferent.

It is true, the power of creation which signalised the Middle Ages seems to have been long exhausted. The decline of Christian art began with the Renaissance of ancient letters, and the decline attained its greatest extreme in that age of rationalism *par excellence*,—the eighteenth century. The favor which was later bestowed on Catholic architecture, which had been temporarily decried, and on the arts which were associated with it, was not accompanied by a like return to the mediæval faith. The same zeal was bestowed upon all the work of reconstructing the past; it was the historical passion of the century just passed,—a work of erudition and not of faith.

To-day the debasement of Christian art is only too patent. The religious imagery is wretched, the sacerdotal garb is at times ridiculous, and the liturgy is disgraced by vulgar songs. I have known ecclesiastics who preferred the mediocre structures of to-day to the venerable edifices of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. the Church of the Trinity to Notre Dame. The genius of Catholicism is no longer fecund, and only partly sustains itself in the magnificent frame-work of its past.

Yet some signs of reformation manifest themselves. Here and there protests arise against the bad taste and the painted fetishes now in vogue; attempts are made to restore the plain chant and the Palestrinian music. A faint renascence is gaining ground in religious art, coincident with a return of zeal, of which we shall speak later on. This movement, insignificant as it is, cannot es-

cape the observation of thinking people. The battle having been lost by them at many different points, though they have not abandoned even these, Catholics appear to have discovered by instinct that their supreme power lies in the revivification of that moral inspiration which has penetrated art and life in so many ways.

I shall not undertake here to examine whether the quality of the French clergy—another factor which contributes to the success of a religion—is better or worse than it was in the preceding centuries. I refer, of course, to the mass of the secular clergy, for it is only too evident that we no longer have among us a Bossuet or a Fénelon. The simple fact that it is recruited from the lower classes of the nation alone suffices to explain why talents, not to speak of virtues, are growing less and less common among them.

To the same cause doubtless is due that restoration of fetishism and low devotion of which we have seen so many instances in the last fifty years. The education which the young abbés enjoy in common is not calculated to change their native aptitudes nor to make one who has taken orders through constraint or indifference the peer of him who has entered the priesthood from zeal or piety.

It is possible that the Protestant clergy, having been chosen from a minority, counts fewer mediocre men than the Catholic clergy,—the parochial clergy at least. Yet, I have reasons for believing that, taking it as a whole, it is not superior; and I cannot discover in the theses presented to the Protestant faculties of theology any convincing proof of a greater liberality of mind.

From careful observation of the different modes of worship current in the Catholic Church, one might be justified in saying that while Protestantism favors individualism in faith, Catholicism favors it in prayer. But individualism in faith presupposes theological discussions for which the Latin race has no taste. It also involves incertitude, which the generality of women cannot endure. They find freedom in the effusions of the heart; whereas the religious man finds it in silent meditation.

As for the unbeliever, he remains as far removed from the one Church as from the other. In some cases he is absolutely ignorant

of both, and we have with us to-day a class of young people which formerly did not exist. Reared in families who do not belong to the Church and withdrawn since childhood from all proselytic influences, these people have neither religious thoughts nor religious habits. Even the contact of ordinary life scarcely affords them a glimpse into the state of the Christian soul, of which they have no understanding. They are not extravagantly irreligious; they have neither religion nor philosophy.

This new generation is distinguished from the preceding by a very significant characteristic. It represents, so to speak, an unknown quantity in our problem. We shall attempt later to determine it.

We may now proceed to verify and extend the conclusions which we have above briefly intimated. It remains for us also to gain a closer insight into the real nature of the religious sentiment, without stopping to define how it depends or can depend upon the general state of sensibility of each individual.

I.

The Christians of France, especially the Catholics, may be divided into four distinct classes.

The first includes the routine devotees, who have no peculiar merit, and whose religion often borders on idolatry or fetishism. The second embraces a different class of believers, the devotees by habit, a more enlightened type, who accept their religion with simplicity and honesty and among whom the religious sentiment gives evidence of the higher aspirations of the human soul. To the third belong believers of the intellectual stripe, who reason out their faith or receive it from some inward light, combative or meditative, according as the trend of their mind leads them toward theology or mysticism. The fourth embraces those who doubt, who have tired of compromising with themselves and their beliefs, and are on the point of separation. With these the decomposition of faith begins and gradually continues to that final stage where a new doctrine takes the place of the ancient faith.

The first of these classes embraces the great mass of Catholics. Its only strength is in its numbers, and we shall see that it does not appreciably change in quality when it runs into unbelief. It happens also that devotees of a higher class may touch this lower stratum in some particular feature and have retained something of its intellectual condition. The old ethnic base from which it draws its sustenance is the same as that whose superstitious practices Cæsar denounced. It appears here and there in all classes of French society.

We have only to look at the crowds that flock to the places of miracles: they are composed of all classes of people. Here, at least, credulity finds its excuse in misery of body or distress of mind. Life is so full of misfortune, man suffers so cruelly both in his own person and in those whom he loves, that it is unbecoming to scoff too rancorously at these weaknesses of the heart and these vain hopes. But what shall we say of the despicability of the cult of St. Anthony of Padua, which has reached so remarkable a climax that the curate of a great parish in Paris refused to receive the image of this Saint into his chapels!

A case has come under my notice, among others, of an educated and well-born man, the son of a disciple of Voltaire, who never shot a hare without promising a coin to this same St. Anthony; he keeps open account with the treasurer of the beatific one, and absolves his indebtedness each month in cash.

And numberless are the devotions of which the poetical and tragical character alone cloaks their paltriness. Such are the vows taken in times of peril, the consecration of infants to the Virgin under the two colors, a sort of first fruits offered to Heaven. The pagan origin of these practices is too well known to be recalled here. Perhaps they are more common in the south of France, which remained more Latin, and through the Latins they may be traced back to the savage populations.

Henri Barth speaks of an African hamlet where the women, believing the camels of their caravans to be sacred beings, crawl under their bellies in order to obtain their favor. Such are the practices at the festival of St. Pancras in a village of the Provence,

where the little children are made to pass under the car carrying the image of the Saint.

I shall not stop to enumerate these practices. Catholicism has accepted and preserved them, not having been able to abolish them so soon from the hearts of the people, where they have dwelt indelibly engraved for many centuries. The people, furthermore, love the charm of them, even though their faith is ordinarily not affected by them. Their religion, reduced to such practices, is nothing more than a body of acts and gestures learned by heart and of formulas mechanically repeated.

II.

Our second class stands on a higher plane than this quasi-idolatrous mass. Nevertheless, certain traits unite the two, for we all, whether believers or unbelievers, ultimately carry within us thousands of vestiges of things long past. We are concerned here with the true Catholics, whose direct testimony appears to me the most instructive.

A gentleman of Anjou, a man of ability and character, calls attention to the delight (and this, let it be noted, expresses the sentiment of many others) which he always experiences and which has grown more intense with years, in "feeling himself borne upon this bark of Peter" which, although assailed often by furious tempests, is bound, through the guidance of its infallible navigator, finally to conduct him into port. "Doubt," he says, "is so sad and so depressing that I pity with all my heart those whose existence it darkens, and I thank God for having spared me and mine this calamity."

Another inhabitant of Anjou not so high in the intellectual scale, who has always been a believer and has grown more so with advancing age, distinguishes the religious sentiments from the human sentiments, on the ground that "the former afford a genuine, sweet, and profound peace"; while the others, on the other hand, "are always mingled with uneasiness and vague impressions, because we know that natural happiness is transitory, and cannot fill completely an insatiable heart." To preserve his faith he has

frequent recourse to the sacraments and cultivates the habit of "humble and fervent" prayer. His object is the possession of eternal life. He feels the need of zealously acting and struggling for the greatest glory of God, "whom we wish to make known and beloved all around us." The teachings of religion lead him "to practicing charity in all the sublimity of the word." He finds in this existence, "deprived of satisfactions and joys in the eyes of the world," a real happiness in this life, as he expects it in the next.

A woman of high character, belonging to the nobility of Anjou, who has passed through much suffering, likewise regards the Catholic religion as "very necessary" to her soul. "The thoughts and the emotions," she writes, "having as their objects virtue, duty, and death, lift the soul and its aspirations into a supernatural world, leaving far below it not only base and wretched thoughts, but also those that are purely human and material." She has never faltered in her religious faith. If she did not firmly believe that her religion was the only true one, she would change it. She prays and practices her religion regularly. "All the acts," she declares, "all the thoughts of a soul profoundly impregnated with the grand truths of religion, should have as their goal the eternal reward of the life to come."

A lady who lives in Paris, the mother of a family and the wife of a wealthy magistrate, shows a more combative humor. She appears to have read much, cites passages from Buisson and from Jaurès, *Les Annales de philosophie chrétienne*, a communication from Canon Pastoret to the Congress of Bourges. Very reserved in her confidences, she is still emphatic and does not analyse her thoughts. She feels religious "in concentration, silence, and meditation, or when some profound emotion,—joy, grief, affection, or admiration,—strikes her soul." "Doubt," she thinks, "produces nothing. I seek the truth; I have faith in it; I make it the basis of my life. Catholicism is the religion that comes most directly from Christ, and it is that which offers the highest ideal of perfection." She says of the Gospel: "The more I ponder it, the more it offers to me all that enlightenment to which the human soul alone can attain." And again, "God placed man in the world to *try* him (that

is, to put him to His tests). Let us be brave and resigned ; let us make ourselves useful ; let us aid our brethren. The difficulties of the way are slight when God guides us."

Another woman, carefully educated and very tolerant, has been living in Algiers ; she has come into contact with all religions, has admired the sincere piety of the Mussulmans, and felt "how a religion is necessary to man in order to aid him to support exile." It is in her hours of suffering that she throws herself into the arms of God, who protects and consoles her. She takes delight in the pomp and ceremony of the Catholic cult, and seeks out the silence and darkness of its chapels, there to offer up her prayers. Her devotion is not painful or exact. It is an intense solace for her to possess the assurance that she will see again those whom she has lost, and that she is also able by prayer to render them some assistance.

A more simple communication, which also comes from an Angevin lady, unmarried, strikes the same note, but with a more delicate accent. She affirms the necessity of a superior being, the need of justice, the need of believing that the beings whom we have loved so much have not been brutally torn from us forever. The distinguished person who here speaks to us feels nearer to God and to religion in grief than in joy. Tribulations, were she without faith, would only find in her "resistance." A believer from infancy, she had some doubts regarding the Church and its commandments between her twentieth and twenty-fifth years ; to-day she reposes in the "faith of the charcoal burner," which appears to her "delicious in its abandonment and simplicity." The religious observance that is to her most necessary is reading and the elevation of the soul, the abandonment of self to God "by thought rather than by words." She loves beautiful ceremonies and beautiful sermons ; she has a horror of the "petty pieties" that belittle religion. With her religion for God is mingled a "religion of beauty" ; she seek for beauty after the manner of Ruskin, passionately, in sentiment, nature, and art. Without these grand religious thoughts, she says with vigor, a woman cannot remain "mistress of herself," after she has lost inevitably the illusions "which

she loves." This is the religion which enables a woman to do her duty as the mother and educator of her children. As for her, since "henceforward there will be a vacancy in that respect" in her life, she gives it to the poor, to the unfortunate, "as much from natural pity," she adds, "as from religion."

Here is the case of two young girls, two unusual characters as I am assured, who have been successful in picturing this state. They did not know each other, but twice hit upon the same expression for rendering their thoughts.

One of them knows herself to be religious from the fact that she has an absolute confidence in "a supernatural power," toward which she turns in prayer "as naturally as a child turns toward its mother." She discovers religious sentiments in her heart "the whole day long," whenever she is in need of aid or comfort, in her hours of delight or sorrow, when she discovers beauty in the moral order, in nature, or in art. Her religious thoughts are characterised by a common tendency to a desire for amelioration. In the Catholic religion she finds precisely the assistance and strength which are lacking to her, the instruction that seems to her the highest to be had, and lastly the promise of a life eternal, filled with peace and light. She founds her faith and constructs her life on the notions of God, soul, and a future world. Her faith is also a source of action, and moves her to fulfil the duties of a young woman, an elder sister, and a friend; it moves her also to awaken the consoling thought of God in the hearts of those who have forgotten him; to awaken it in them who do not know it and "live on earth without light."

The other of these young women likewise declares that she believes in the supernatural, and discovers in herself religious sentiments the "whole day long," when she feels lassitude, when she looks toward "higher things," toward that which is "best" in her, when she discovers beauty, whether of the soul or of objects, for she connects everything with God "who has created all and unceasingly renews all." She distinguishes her religious thoughts by the fact that these thoughts lead her toward the good; and up to this point both our young women use the same language, revealing

thus the strong imprint of the same moral education. The latter, more intellectually inclined if I am not deceived, declares she cannot conceive of morals without religion, that she has need of a "whole, of a system that is imposed." And such is the Catholic system. Her belief in it is so necessary that if she did not think it to be absolutely valid she would "make short shrift of it" and set it aside as an obstacle if the duty which it imposed upon her was at variance with her natural tendencies. She thinks, it is true, she is impelled by her own nature to aid her neighbor, but she recognises her kindly disposition as a gift of God, and is anxious to have it serve the higher ideal which she finds in the Gospel. She wishes she had greater wealth, to do more good for the unfortunate, not only by alms but by direct personal action. It appears to her that here lies the real interest of life.

Another communication rests more upon a characteristic trait. The lady in question, who belongs to a family of high functionaries, thinks she is Catholic from the fact that she is naturally inclined to admit without examination, and to believe without discussion, anything that is taught her by recognised authority. An intense need for peace and unity holds her in an absolute faith which leaves no leeway for her exceedingly timorous and brooding spirit. She inherited from her father, who was not a believer, the habit of introspection, and this natural disposition also made confession the most necessary practice for her. Formerly, before her marriage, she became so excessively devoted to the practice as to alarm her confessor. Her religious life is richest when she feels happy and is delivered from every grave anxiety. Religious thoughts "calm" her, "fortify" her, "illuminate" her. She declares herself "essentially carried to the state of grace."

Let us sum up in a few lines the physiognomy of this interesting group.

To the question seeking to penetrate the nature of the religious sentiment, such as our correspondents could define it by self-questioning, I have received no answer up to the present in which anything else appears save the indication of some very general trait, internal peace, assurance against doubt, the aspiration toward a

higher world, filial piety, and the sentiment of the beautiful. It manifests itself now in happiness and now in misery, according to temperament, some confiding their sorrows to the Divine Master, others their joys, in order that they may be diminished or increased by his participation; for the idea of God is always present in the religious sentiment thus understood, whether it have for its object the divine will or its creation. It appears as a composite state linked even with a state of sensibility in each subject, where are also prominently marked, according to the person and occasion, the signs of fear, love, pity, æsthetic longings, or moral anxiety. The supernatural attracts the soul without merging the latter in it. The aspiration toward the divine does not reach immersion in God, which is the goal of mystical ecstasy. It does not transcend the point of orientation of desires, or of wished-for alleviation.

As for belief, it remains traditional; it is sustained by habit, and represents a sort of harmony of internal forces established by education and heredity. If doubt enters, it never eats to the foundation, but is dissipated with the enthusiasm of youth. The mind is not sufficiently original or vigorous, and life does not offer enough unexpected turns of fortune to justify it in bartering away its certitudes. The need of moral equilibrium shrinks from running the risks of reasoning. The sweetness of belief wins the day over the feeble outbursts of criticism. Reason intervenes only to give strength in its first stages, not to dispute and not to argue or examine exhaustively. The state of belief is not distinct from the emotional state.

The special notions of God, the soul, and a future world are said to be constantly present, and constitute the guides of life. The doctrine of immortality is the dearest to the heart of the woman who has suffered and wept; it would appear that she cannot tear herself from the hope of some day finding her beloved dead, illusory as the hope may be. It would appear, finally, that the religious thoughts of this class of believers impelled them to do good, to devote themselves to benefactions. And they assert this fact with so much conviction that it is necessary to see in it something more than a mere lesson learned, especially as the les-

son is one that has germinated in the rich soil of a "natural disposition." Some even cannot conceive of moral virtue outside of religion; they feel themselves or imagine themselves to be so weak that their passions would control them without this restraint.

I put no special questions regarding the worship of the Virgin and the Saints. It is remarkable that no allusion is made to them in the responses I received; but I desired the answers to be perfectly uninfluenced and took care not to indicate in any way the mode of reply. There is no doubt that many rigorous observances are practised in this group, and a more searching investigation would reveal the forms they take. But piety assumes here, upon the whole, a moderate form; it is not far-fetched, and is able to keep in harmony with the world. We have here the average class of simple and genuine Catholics. These faithful disciples, especially the women among them, do not seek the doubtful hazard of a higher theological instruction or of a thoroughgoing examination of their beliefs; they do not scrutinise the secrets of their hearts; they are docile sheep in the hands of their pastor, and they do not waste in sensual effusions or in reveries disquieting for their faith the forces which the duties of life demand of them.

III.

Our third class is perhaps less heterogeneous, and yet it is difficult to describe; the subjects that compose it revealing a species of dogmatism in which the reason and the heart appear alternately to prevail, to antagonise, and to confound each other. Here belong the majority of the priests, both secular and regular.

It is here that certain restrictions must be placed upon the value of an inquiry such as ours. In the sincerest confidences there always enters, I admit, some elements of deception; each of us unconsciously poses more or less before himself, and we accept as our own the pose that appears to us the most commendable; and the deception to which we lend ourselves denounces the quality which we do not possess, or the ideal toward which we tend. The person which we would have ourselves be thus finally conquers, or perhaps rather betrays, the person which we are.

But while this is unquestionable as regards our moral attitudes, in matters of faith it is different. Not all the persons interrogated feel themselves free to reply, and the subterfuges of those who risk replies are not apparent. But even abstention is instructive, from the manner in which it is justified; and the very trend that the thought takes in its subterfuges is also a precious datum.

A young man who was serving his novitiate with the Jesuits excused himself in the following manner to a relative who had requested him to reply to my *questionnaire*. "The majority of Catholics," he thought, "would refuse" to answer. "Upon the whole," he added, "it does not seem to me that the questions put the religious problem exactly in its right light; they virtually take it for granted that our state of soul implies nothing more than a *sentiment*, whilst it is primarily a conviction of the mind, a faith based on scientific and philosophical reasons, an intellectual doctrine antecedently to being a principle of conduct. Considered from this last point of view, our religion ought to be not the sole nor the most immediate of our reasons for acting, but it should enter and form part of all of them; in fact, in the life of a religious it is the one that most often dominates, though without excluding other reasons, etc."

We have here a characteristic trait of this new group. These people will have a religion which is a body of *knowledge*; they protest against being religious by emotion or by any unreasoned inclination of the mind. A Catholic priest, from whom I have an only too brief reply, "*distrusts*" (and I italicise the word) all the religious acts of his soul "that are expressible only as sentiments, and particularly as emotions." He knows himself to be religious by the fact that he "seeks to make sacrifices," and when "some movement of grace" directs his intelligence or his will toward God.

The word *grace* may appear here contradictory to the rational motives of criticism. It implies a singular mode of action, the value of which is more profoundly understood by the men with whom we have here to do.

The following testimonies came from two students of medicine, two clever young people thoroughly capable of introspection.

One of these young men thinks that "in its vaguest form the religious sentiment is the need of an ideal, of a belief in a world beyond, a feeling of impotence and a desire for power"; that which characterises it, he adds, and this note is here again the same, "is that it brings us near to God." He can conceive no thoughts nor religious emotions from which the idea of God is absent. Artistic emotions, sublime, philosophical thoughts, all grand and beautiful things, envelop the religious sentiment or take from it their mark, "because they are for us the point of departure of an aspiration toward God, because they are the suggestion that causes the soul to go forth from itself, etc."

These states of the religious soul may exist, according to him, without particular belief other than a belief in God and in the existence and immortality of the soul. Religion, furthermore, does not seem to him to be "a mere matter of sentiment," but a "necessity," without which life would be impossible. "As long as reason," he declares, thus emphasising the insufficiency of vague religiosity, "has no base on which to support its faith, as long as conscience has no inviolable rule by which its weaknesses are corrected, the soul will always float in dim twilight racked by uncertainty and doubt." And again, "What a transformation when faith strengthens and moulds the religious sentiment! The soul discovers the goal, the principle of all things. Its yearnings and its loves have found their object."

He attributes the defects of Catholicism to man solely. He finds in his faith "all of the precision of simple, reasonable, and immutable dogmas." His belief is also his motive of conduct. Prayer would appear to him empty were it not the principle of a "renewal" of activity. "To sacrifice everything for those who suffer, to approach sympathetically all miseries, to care for all physical and moral wounds, especially when very repulsive, to live only for the unfortunate, and in order to afford them the solace for which they look and to which they are entitled, to diffuse about one the truth of consolation and love,—such," he declares, "is what the voice of my religious conscience commands me to do."

The second of these young men, born in France of a Flemish

family, strikes a richer and more significant note. It appears that in him the religious sentiment is mingled with his innate disposition, which causes him to believe spontaneously. I discover in him a passionate imagination, an unconquerable aspiration for the Absolute, in which he shall find repose of mind and reasons for life. A peculiar sentimental substratum supports his entire intellectual edifice. As he understands it, a religion "impregnates life rather than inspires it, gives direction rather than adornment to it." He feels himself religious by the subordination of "even his future" thought, and of "even his eventual" life, to the Catholic faith, that is to say, by a conscious act of his own, although the presence of that "entirety" which is faith appears to him quite "impersonal." He admits the existence of Truth; what is more, he lives for it. "The promises of Christ," he says, "are realised in those who believe in Him; they live the life of Christ, which is to say, the Holy Spirit dwells within them."

This bent of mind is still more distinctly revealed by his classification of the methods of knowledge, of which there are two, one appertaining to the positive man and the other to the religious man. Whilst the possession of rational truths is gained singly and laboriously, the "process" by means of which he assimilated Catholicism is directly the opposite; that "cohesion of certainties" which he calls religious is for him a full guarantee of the special character of these certainties. When the Absolute comes to us, and we have recognised it, the truth which it reveals ought to be admitted in the aggregate. He recognises nothing *human* in his religion save his "act of adhesion and of love."

Thus, his belief offers the distinctly marked characteristic of being entire or of not being at all. Religion cannot be the result of human work. Revealed truths would enter necessarily even into a religion compounded of the elements of several others. But such a situation does not appear to him to be acceptable; he does not believe that we can retain the name of religion for a "partial choice of revealed truths." The certainties of religion, as he understands them, form a compact bundle, no part of which can be separated from the rest. These certainties, these "supra-sensible" truths,

needed for their acceptance merely his "yielding to the belief that the Absolute was better informed than we." The Absolute came to him and he received it.

As for discovering the Absolute in the person of Christ, our correspondent confesses that this is more difficult; but, he remarks, if we have once accepted Him as such, we must either take or reject His revelation; it is all or nothing.

He accordingly eliminates all criticism from faith, and at the same time flatters himself upon having discussed "the foundations of that authority" which he believes absolute, with all the faculties of his being, and with the free scrutiny of his conscience. Finding nothing to contradict it in science or in his own moral conscience, he is resolved not to reject one jot or tittle of it. Collectively the acts which constitute his life and which should be severally inspired by his belief, are, he avows, often in conflict with it; but they have not weakened it. One thing only would trouble his faith, and that is if opinions and acts that contravene it "were not followed with remorse."

Every religious state of soul, it appears to him, may be harmonised with some religion, the Reformation having no limits. Every man who wishes to bring his religion and his religious state of soul into accord, will find in Protestantism a free choice between the Christian truths. This is indeed an interesting reply to the question put, as to whether the religion practiced corresponded exactly to the religious state of soul, and we shall see later that the solution indicated for this fervent Catholic is actually followed by others. Nevertheless, for him no other religion is possible but his own: the Absolute could not have revealed itself in two ways.

The distinction which he makes between a philosophical system and a creed is that the former is never spontaneously admitted by us. Thus, he adds, our adhesion to a system of philosophy "never carries with it a change of heart." Thoughts, emotions, sentiments, all are religious in him, for all the forces of his being are subject to the control of faith, and tend only to "diffuse the life of grace." And it is when he believes, wishes, or feels himself performing some "apostolic act" that the religious life appears to

manifest itself in his heart most strongly. His apostleship proves his faith as generation proves life.

He speaks of the "weaknesses he has lived through." He regrets that the notions of God, the soul, and a future world are not present to him as often as he might wish. Still, the habit of meditating upon them gives to his thought a frequently unaccustomed direction. He dreads Hell as "the voluntary hatred and rejection of the love of God." He longs for Paradise "as the superior miracle of the enchantment of relative souls by absolute beauty." To introduce something of sacrifice into his life,—this is the goal, he finally avers, in which all true religion should culminate. Resignation is victory.

The religious sentiment, in fine, as we have found it in this remarkable example, does not appear to derive its sustenance in any marked degree from either fear, love, or art. It answers primarily to a disposition of the mind, the precise relations of which with the physiological tone of the subject it is difficult to discover. The religious life of our subject is centered in a sort of intellectual vision which would terminate rather in proselytic activity than in ecstasy. The apparent trait of mysticism in him is presumably his method of knowledge, an enravishment of the mind by the Absolute, which comes to him, which he recognises, and to which he abandons himself.

It would appear that his faith,—so entirely accepted that the denial of a single one of its articles would annihilate it,—remains for this very reason subject to accident and danger of dissolution; but it is also supported by the same disposition of the intellect and of the whole soul, which makes it what it is. His reason is of itself inclined to receive the miraculous assistance of grace. The remorse, in which he discovers a sort of criterion, is with him only the spontaneous reaction of a moral nature already moulded. Endowed as he is, he would never reach the calm abstention of the skeptic; he would have become a bold metaphysician if Catholicism had not subjected him to her sway, and had not disciplined at a single blow all the energies of his sentiments.

Many Catholics are akin to this type. A certain number of:

women would also be grouped in this class under the head of reasoners or mystics. Among some priests, I am not warranted in saying among many, greater freedom of criticism and a more original turn of mind tends to produce a distinctively individual moral situation, where faith argues with itself and is clarified by a species of decantation. The following reply offers a significant example of this.

The ecclesiastic to whom I owe it was born and still is a Catholic. Catholicism, as he understands it, bears the entire legacy of the most distant past and the vital germ of all the civilisation of the future. Jesus was its "restorer and saviour." The Roman Church in his eyes is not Catholicism; Judæo-Alexandrian as to its dogmas and cult and Cæsarian as to its form of government, the Church is only the garment, the external and transitory form of the faith.

This priest knows himself to be religious both by his intellect and by his soul: by his intellect, because his reason transcends the finite and the sensible; by his soul, because his heart, dissatisfied with what here goes forward, hungers for the Absolute and thirsts for the Eternal.

Religious also for him is every thought, every emotion, every manifestation, every work, which binds us to the Infinite, which excites and satisfies in us this need of the divine; religious, "every man of whatever faith or dogmatism" who carries and fosters in himself this aspiration, "and who, confident of his immortality, reveals his belief in love for everything that lives and suffers about him." He sees perfectly that Catholicism "is declining and apparently perishing," in so far as it is the work of man; but he cherishes the conviction that it will assume in the future a new scientific, æsthetic, and social life, and that the gospel of the spirit will ultimately free it from the humiliating tyranny of the letter. Prayer, charity, the idea of the Beyond, the Eucharistic communion properly understood,—these are the four immovable corner-stones on which the future Church will rest: they have been disfigured, but not destroyed.

Men of this type in their higher manifestations are the light

and glory of a church; but it very frequently happens that they steal away in the night and pass to the camp of the enemy. And their flight is due to widely varying causes, more or less active according to the times and the temperament of the individual,—disaffection of the soul, the rebellion of the intellect, shattered ideals, or the source of obedience, whether it comes from the heart or the head.

But here a new chapter opens, the decomposition of belief.

IV.

We have seen faith at its heroic crisis. It holds its own here not without a struggle, and in many men and women who declare themselves to be sincere Catholics there is already marked at this stage a process of dissolution, of which I shall now indicate the principal steps.

The first situation is that of avowed Catholics, who have made a choice among the Church's beliefs and practices. We no longer find in these that steadfastness, that unity of being, which we have described. One can no longer say of such persons that they are—to borrow a phrase from one of the preceding communications—"models of their faith"; they are "reformed" without wishing it and without knowing it, and they do not wish it because they still retain at heart the Catholic soul in spite of the liberty which they allow themselves.

Such is one of our correspondents, a man of the old nobility and of a high order of merit, who knows much and has lived much. From his eighteenth to his fiftieth year he was skeptical. Some doubts, he admits, still subsist in his mind. But all his aspirations "tend toward an absolute faith." He does not rigorously observe his religious duties. His staunch faith in God nevertheless leads him to put credence in one particular doctrine,—that to which the memories of his house and family bind him. He discovers himself to be religious when in the presence of any of the manifestations of worship, and especially, although he is not of a sad turn of mind, "in mortuary ceremonies." His adhesion to the Catholic faith appears to me to be determined by a profound feeling of social

necessity, that is, by extra-religious motives. The notions of God, the soul, and future life occupy, he says, a considerable place in his reflections and intellectual occupations. He combats unceasingly the process of transformation that bids fair to overcome them. Of a combative nature, he feels himself sometimes impelled to take up arms against the attacks of free masonry on Catholicism. He detests "the men who, having in their hands the instruction of the people, aim to win them away from every belief, thus robbing them of their most efficacious weapon in the struggle for an honest life, profitable both to country and humanity."

The following are the curious statements of two women.

The first thinks that religious faith plays a considerable rôle in the inner life of woman. "If she loses," she says, "her naïve and solid faith, if dogma dissolves, on reflection, as sugar does in water, there remains nevertheless a religious instinct, a need of the ideal, a sort of instinctive certainty of a higher moral life, of an intellectual or immortal world which just as surely exists as the physical world." It is an easy thing to deny the immortality of the soul! In each one of us, she says, is a principle which connects us with the unknown God, with the eternal and immortal principle. She is not Protestant "to the letter," but she has taken her refuge in Christ. "His beautiful ethics" has conquered her forever. One of the grand disillusionings of her life is her inability to practice it "in spirit and in truth," though it still remains her light and her faith.

The second of these ladies, who has responded more fully than the first, "belongs *de facto*" to the Catholic religion, but her personal tastes and predilections incline her to Protestantism. But one must, she says, be extremely religious to change one's religion, and this is not the case with her. She does not believe she has the religious spirit; she thinks that the happy ones of this world have no need of faith, which is the last resource and consolation of the unfortunate; if she seeks it and desires it without finding it, it is solely "for want of a better." She has not discovered in herself religious sentiments, save "in times of great suffering"; when pain and death have come into her life, she has "felt" the

necessity of believing in some "recompensation" in the other world, in the achievement at some future time of the destiny which we have dreamed of but not found on this earth. Her highest desire would be "to eternalise human love."

A believer to the age of fifteen, she ceased being such on reading Taine, Renan, and certain other authors. She is now twenty-five years old, and rather reverts to her faith, "but by an act of will, and from sentiment, not from reason."

She criticises the Catholic religion for its narrowness and its insufficiency; all she accepts of it is the slight vestige of Christianity which it seems to her is still left, viz., the faith in Jesus Christ. And yet she does not see in Jesus as she does in Shâkyamuni and Mohammed, only the more or less inferior manifestations of the divine thought. It is to God that everything must be traced back and to God that every rational explanation of the world, of suffering, and of life must be referred, "under penalty of death by pain and discouragement."

God and the eternity of the soul,—such are the two goals of her faith: "instinct of eternity imprisoned in a mortal body." For at bottom she has only semi-beliefs and hypotheses, in conformity to which, "lacking a better reality," she lives. It appears to her impossible to believe "without doubting what one believes." The answers of the intellect to the needs of the soul are insufficient. She does not seek to force on other persons the hypotheses that she has chosen. "Religion, faith, and love," she writes, "are individual things and belong solely to the sphere of sentiment, not to that of reason."

Yet her religion is far from being inactive. While her belief dwells within her, the power of action which she derives from it is diffused outwardly. Religious observance in her eyes is action: to do good, to suffer, to submit. Prayer is only "an aid to action, the trigger of the soul." Her religious life is recapitulated in a single phrase: love of others. Contemplation and mysticism in any of their forms seem to her not only an error but a downright fault; she sees in the world only the necessity of acting, of acting rightly, conformably to one's conscience and one's reason.

With this last lady, who appears to us as a sweet suffering soul, the religious life is especially manifested as an expression of human weakness, of a wrecked and shattered love, of a beautiful dream that has faded away. Her deeply rooted belief in the immortality of the soul and in the higher life corresponds to a logical need of moral equilibrium and of compensation, and is also the desire for an affection which shall endure beyond the tomb. Everything bordering on mysticism in the rigorous sense of an immersion of the soul in God or of a blind adhesion to faith is discarded, but not the mysticism of unfettered dreaming or vague aspiration. If the most necessary ideas are conceived as conjectures, the doubt that remains inherent in them suffers them to subsist with undiminished vivacity in those recondite recesses of conscience where reason can gain no foothold.

With this latter lady—as with the former—we have taken a forward step in the direction of the dissolution of belief. We are now passing to a second stage, which numbers of Protestants and Catholics have, in my opinion, reached,—a stage marked by a vague religiosity exhibited according to temperament in either an idealistic or mystical form. This religiosity retains nevertheless some portion of the Christian truths, and reposes on the discipline of its Church, adhering at more than one point to Christianity. But in the case of others we shall see these points of adherence weakening and loosening, until finally they vanish.

The following is the case of a lady belonging to an environment composed of jurists, physicians, and university people, whose education “has been moulded by the spirit of examination and ratiocination.” At the adult age she “voluntarily” renounced Catholicism and had her children reared in the faith of “liberal Protestantism.” A species of religiosity which she attributes to her conscientious submission to the commandments of the Church made its appearance in her at the time of her first communion; her gradual emancipation caused it to vanish. She does not think that she has now what is called the religious spirit, “unless,” she says, “the religious spirit is nothing more than a kind of elevation toward the ideal, produced by artistic emotions, by grand spectacles

of nature, or the lofty meditations of ethics." A special belief is not necessary for her; she follows the teachings of a liberal Protestantism, which corresponds "approximately" to her religious state. She ignores "the narrow side of her creed and the few ingredients of dogma which it contains," clinging solely to its moral teachings, which she finds extremely noble.

She refrains from either denying or accepting the notions of God, the soul, and a future life; these notions, she thinks, pass the powers of human comprehension. Further, she does not deem them indispensable to action. Finally, judging from numerous examples in her own environment, she has concluded that a purely ethical instruction may suffice to form honest, upright, and high-minded beings, "whilst confessional education, pure and simple, is impotent in this regard." Catholicism, further, appears to her to exercise, in education at least, a demoralising influence. She criticises the "political spirit of the clerical party," which has so completely confounded facts, dogmas, and practices that frequently there is nothing left "among the disillusioned followers of Catholicism," of either belief, religious spirit, or morality.

A magistrate, the husband of the lady just cited, also suddenly renounced during adolescence the doctrines of the Roman Church. Later, his thought, "enlightened by observation of the social conduct of Catholics," led him "to repudiate absolutely traditional religion and even to look upon the Catholic spirit as detrimental to genuine devotion and to the following of a satisfactory moral code." He can now only call himself a free-thinker; he "dares to affirm" that he is so without intolerance. He does not believe himself religious; he does not see the least necessity for a particular belief of a dogmatic character, and abides by the conception of a body of moral duties, "or if the expression appear more appropriate, by a body of obligations of conscience toward oneself and others." He does not reject as void of all interest "the problems relating to the existence of a personal God, of an individual immaterial principle surviving the body of each one of us, and called the soul"; but he declares himself powerless to find the solution of them and does not believe that the rules of social conduct are in need of a doctrine

founded on these mysterious questions. He inclines rather "to a sort of pantheism."

To the same class belongs a Parisian lady, wealthy, intelligent, infirm, and blighted in her dearest affection. She abandoned completely the Catholic religion, of which even the ceremonies scarcely impress her, so greatly is she irritated by "their underlying fatuity." She follows no creed, accepts neither revelation nor supernaturalism, and declares herself refractory in metaphysics, although idealistic in spite of this fact. "Gazing on the starry heavens, or on some magnificent spectacle of nature," she writes, "I am profoundly troubled, and I avow that I comprehend with difficulty that intelligent beings can find full satisfaction in artistic admiration only. Before the infinitely small I experience the same ecstasy . . . These are the only moments when I can discern in myself a religious sentiment, if I may at all so qualify this emotion." Common sense, she thinks, dictates that in the lack of a religious belief she should abstain from curious inquiries; but, though ignorant of science, she has the "speculative" spirit, and these lofty questions "fascinate her nevertheless."

She is in no need of a particular belief, although she would prefer not "to live in the open air"; in following the good she is at least sure of not being deceived. She feels within herself an ideal of moral beauty and of kindness, in communion with which she loves to live, but which she grieves to see contravened by the brutal laws of nature. Her intellectual peace is troubled by it, even when her conscience is at rest.

Never in the most sorrowful hours of her life has she felt the need of turning toward God, who, even if he existed, would not, she thinks, interest himself in her individuality. Her consolation has always come from her sentiment of duty, from comparison of her own state with that of those more unfortunate than herself, from her resigned submission to the laws of the universe; for she believes that there are laws in the moral order just as there are in the physical. The word *God* corresponds to so gigantic an interrogation point for her that she abhors all cynical and blasphemous spirits of negation. She does not know whether he exists, nor

whether the soul exists; she has the impression that our soul is extinguished with death. These ideas regarding human destiny suffice for the conduct of her life; but she is averse nevertheless to disseminating them, since she thinks them insufficient from a social point of view.

Another lady less favored by fortune and who appears to be very reticent, refuses to explain herself at length. "One can," she writes, "easily confess things to oneself which one would not like to commit to others." Further, it would be somewhat like criticising those who had reared her and also those with whom she associated; again, "since all things hang together" (I draw attention to this passage), "and since the portion of sentiment with which every one is burdened never remains inactive, it would also be necessary to say what use she had made of her portion; and why it tended to direct her to one side rather than to another." She affirms, nevertheless, that she is absolutely lacking in religiosity. "Far from its being a privation to me," she writes with some warmth, "I believe that its consoling feature is the conviction that there is nothing after death, that one has made an end of all suffering. Every one puts his hope where he can; mine asks nothing but oblivion, that is in the other world, for in this I have other pretensions."

A young woman of twenty-six, an Angevin, wealthy, very intellectual, and of good family, gives us in compensation a very extended communication, interesting in all points. She was a believer and Catholic up to her fourteenth year. From the day of her first communion she ceased to be such. "I divined," she writes, "the lies, the crafty machinations, the selfish policy; I fathomed the consciencelessness, the despotism, and especially the slavery, of fervent Catholics." Out of regard for her family, and from a sort of intellectual laziness and a cowardly respect for public opinion, she nevertheless followed the practices of her religion. But she reproached herself for it, and especially she reproached Catholicism for its antagonism of the Gospel, on which it rested, and for not admitting freedom of will and individual control of conscience. For these reasons the Protestant religion was

more to her taste. The latter at least did not enforce such puerile practices and did not put love under the tutelage of the confessor, and "banish beauty."

Such is the dominating note of this character which appears to me to be essentially artistic, lofty, and with a passion for excessive imagination.

The thoughts and the emotions which she would characterise as religious, "or rather as sacred," spring up in her when contemplating some beautiful spectacle of nature, or on hearing some beautiful work of man. "Sometimes," she says, "on the summit of a mountain, in the evening, and in the neighborhood of glaciers, I have had for the moment the conviction that some power, some reason, some higher superhuman beneficence, presided over so much harmony and order; but I have never likened this powerful, intelligent, beneficent, and *divine* being, so vaguely and fugitively conceived, to the God that the modern Catholic Church portrays." When she sees the gloom created about her by the priests, she ardently longs for the "æsthetic morals of the Athenians, their light-hearted gladness, and the humanity of the Greek cults in the fourth century before Christ."

The dominating duty in her eyes is respect for oneself and one's ideals, the employment of one's faculties "in life for life." She "is absolutely in doubt regarding the serious and fundamental questions of future life, eternity, our ultimate destiny, and to what is commonly called our *soul*. None of the solutions proposed satisfy her reason; she thinks that we know nothing, that we are sure of nothing, and that a vast amount of vanity, credulity, stupidity, superficiality, or lunacy, is requisite to assert that either God exists or does not exist, and to draw any conclusions from such a hypothesis."

A very significant communication comes finally, from another young woman, a Parisian and a composer of merit, distinguished in every respect. Reared by non-communicating parents, she belongs to no religion. She boldly declares being unable to accept even the principle of God, that is, "the existence of a supreme Force acting consciously on what we perceive of the universe."

She can see no argument deduced from the beauty, duration, or regularity of our world that affirms this principle. She does not admire the world, "being unable to compare it to anything else but itself." She is unable, therefore, to follow any of the existing religions; being only tentative explanations of the unknown, to her it seems natural that they should change, seeing that they depend, like every hypothesis, on the number and the state of the things known at the time of their formation.

But if she deems herself incompetent to judge the world, nothing prevents her, by way of compensation, she says, from loving it. She loves it, then, "as the fish loves the water, because it cannot live without it." She cannot see that this felicitous harmony which keeps us in accord with things is even a subject for admiration, which is an emotion rather than a judgment. She seeks to reduce everything to the intellectualistic point of view,—the divine principle as well as religion and ethics. But her sentiment resumes its rights, and she describes wonderfully the state of her soul, which is highly remarkable.

Unbelieving as she might at first appear and coldly rationalistic, she yet discovers that the religious sentiment is highly developed in her. Her sympathy extends to those who believe; she understands them and they understand her. There is nothing in their lives of which she does not seize instinctively the most delicate manifestation. "Yes," she declares, "all who have ever believed are my equals, my brothers, whilst nothing is more foreign to me than the incredulous common sense that does not dream. The accents, the expressions, of their faith penetrate me with so profound and genuine an emotion that I have been compelled more than once to give voice to my feelings in music." And an artist "in her language never lies."

"It is odd," she continues, with her refreshing candor, "that my heart can be stirred by what has never troubled my reason, but it is a fact, and I have long fostered without knowing it the contradiction that abides in me."

She partly, though unwittingly, explains this contradiction when she supposes the probable reason of it is that "religions are

the most beautiful and touching creations of man." Or again, when she says that the religious sentiment "resides" in every being who feels that ideas are of life and that "religion must be the imperfect and variable expression of a sentiment which exists before any defined belief, and itself creates its own object."

The fact is that her creative nature protests both against irreligion and against traditional dogmatism, against the barrenness of heart inherent in negation and the curbing of fancy by the letter. She has need of faith and of freedom. The same stroke of the wing that exalts the great religious mystics above the poverty of vulgar religion carries her beyond precisely defined dogmas and narrow observances and causes her to accept no more of religion than the aspiration for the beautiful, which is the divine, and the sincerity of effort to attain it. Her intellectual deficiencies are offset by her spontaneous artistic genius, and we have here a striking example of the resurrection of the religious sentiment by art, a proof of the conciliating truth that all noble creatures are at bottom acting by desire and by living belief.

In our group of dissidents of varying degrees we have hitherto met with the partial rejection or negation of Catholicism without any clearly conceived doctrine being instituted to take its place. The last stage is marked by the deliberate substitution of one belief for another, of a coherent body of ideas and sentiments for ideas and sentiments that have been undermined. This substitution is in some instances effected either by the adoption of a doctrine already formed, like positivism, or by the constant employment of one's forces in the search for some new truth. Examples of this class abound, but one should be careful not to imagine that this is the common practice, or that disintegration of the Christian faith (for Christianity at large is essentially involved here) necessarily carries with it in all cases a distinct advantage. The ruin of traditional ideas is only too often synonymous with a reversion to an inferior state, not only in the ignorant classes, but even in those which possess the polish of a higher culture.

I have unqualifiedly denounced the coarse devotions rampant in the Catholic religion; it has preserved the use of the amulet,

and its belief in miraculous interventions has led to the most puerile practices. But religion alone, I must reiterate, is not involved here; the ancient and vital character of man comes to light in these miseries. A like inferiority is discoverable in many men who have abandoned religion, and we have found at the limit of the dissolution the same ethical and moral situation that stamps its lower grades. We have seen quite recently all manner of people thronging about the doors of ignorant women necromancers, and the less disguised humbuggery of occultism never wants its patrons.

Simple and straightforward souls in whom faith vanishes are more apt to revert to a kind of natural religion. Such is the case of an honest workwoman of the environs of Paris. To the question whether she believed in God, she replied: "He has never had much concern for me in my times of trouble. Why should I concern myself about him?" To the question whether God existed, she answered that she knew nothing of the kind, and she thought with all the other people round about that the real god was the sun which made everything grow. To the other question, whether she expected nothing after death, whether all ended with death, she said: "We are like the plants; they spring up and they die, and then new ones spring up." She had no time to go to church, but she would not be averse to spending an hour there on Sunday, for it was "a tidy place" where one could rest and hear good songs and music. More people than we are aware of in our agricultural districts in France have reverted to this childish paganism. The situation is, relatively speaking, favorable, since there comes to light in it at least a need of poetry and a desire for something higher. But how many people fall to a still lower state, to the lowest level of the animal! They have lost utterly the little decency which religion, despite all, infuses into life at some hours. They seek for nothing else in this world but enjoyment and the indulgence of their lusts.

v.

The idolatrous mass which composed our first group are not followers of French Protestantism, which is the result of a selec-

tion. The Reformation could not reach this stagnating residuum of the population, these ethnical offscourings massed together in certain remote corners of our provinces, whose superstitions the Catholic priests have purified and sometimes utilised when unable to eradicate them. The very rejection of a constant and miraculous divine intervention in the pettiest affairs of life carries with it among Protestants important consequences in belief and religious observances. Perhaps we are constrained to see here a really fundamental difference; and the acceptance of miracles, however limited, nevertheless stamps with a definite mark Catholics of the higher order, akin as they may be otherwise to Protestant Christians of the same class.

We should doubtless have discovered signs of decomposition, or rather, of the transformation of belief in certain Catholic priests who have remained nevertheless good Catholics,—could we have obtained their confidences. Similar indications distinctly appear in some Protestants. M. W. Monod¹ has recently told us of the doubts which the orthodox theology of Calvinism inspired in Vinet. Not only would Vinet not admit the plenary inspiration of the Scriptures, and not only did he regard the Bible as a collection of human writings, but he was troubled throughout his whole life by the difficulties which the dogma of redemption offered to his mind; he could not conceive of the idea of substitution which served as the basis of this dogma and which appeared to him contradicted by our moral notions.

M. Auguste Sabatier² was seized with similar doubts. He discarded both the primitive theological notion of a ransom paid by God to Satan and the consequent juridical conception of an objective satisfaction rendered to God under the form of a debt paid to a creditor or of a substitutive penalty agreed on by the judge; he sees in the drama of Calvary only the most sublime example among many others of the devotion of love,—condition of salvation and of new life in the moral world.

¹ *Vinet douteur* (Paris, Fischbacher).

² *Études de théologie et d'histoire* (Paris, Fischbacher).

Our correspondents, as we have seen, do not enter into these discussions. The dissolution of belief is effected, among the greatest number of them, by the way of vague reasoning. When doubt has forced a French Catholic out of the church, he only rarely takes refuge in Protestantism, and, if at all, only for a short time; usually he overleaps it also with the same bound, and this is one of the reasons why we cannot believe in the success of Protestantism in France, at least in the form in which we see it to-day.

As to the Jews, my personal observations on their religious mentality has been confirmed in various ways. A lady who kindly volunteered to obtain responses to my *questionnaire* writes: "I have not been successful with the most intelligent Jews, who have confessed to me that they no longer believe in their religion, but do not care to say anything derogatory of it; this is a general sentiment in Israel."

These reservations being made, let us attempt to draw some conclusions from the psychological data presented, directing our attention chiefly to the three questions of religious sentiment, faith or religious conviction, and the notions of "God" and "soul."

It would be too hazardous to affirm that the religious sentiment is weakening or for that matter that it was preserving its full vitality in society. The external observation of a cult does not necessarily imply a vigorous piety, and piety also may be met with apart from any definite religious practice. I am at least inclined to think that the diseased form of religious sentiment which finds expression in asceticism with its extreme consequences now appears less frequently. Thus, there is most likely being effected in the heart of Catholicism a transformation which has already begun in Protestantism.

Honor is paid to Luther for having dissipated the chimera of an angelic life superior to the ordinary life of men, and for having shown that piety dwells in the accomplishment of the humblest duties, social life being of greater value than solitude, marriage than celibacy, the full development of our faculties than their repression. And this was "the most absolute contradiction of every-

thing that the Church had lived, believed, and practised up to this time.¹

Protestantism profited thus by the natural progress which granted to new societies a less troubled and more solidly established existence, but this influence also made itself felt in the moral life of Catholicism. The opposition became still more pronounced between the two currents which have always carried its advancement, and the celebrated quarrel in which Bossuet arose against Fénelon contributed to the triumph of the piety that set its foundation in reason and action.

To every effort to establish a religion based on an intellectualistic psychology, there corresponds, it is true, a reaction. We see it to-day take the form of a vague religiosity and a delicate mysticism culminating in a sort of neo-Christianity fostered by a sickly and impassioned sensibility. This sensibility, furthermore, does not find its sole expression in the form of religious mysticism; it extends over all of life, and we see in it a disposition inherent in human nature which produces certain manifestations of saintliness, as it has produced others in politics, art, and philosophy.

We must distinguish, therefore, between what is healthy and durable and what is sickly and perishable; and in my opinion it is the healthy form of religious sentiment that tends to prevail, although it is impossible to say at present to what end the existing crisis in belief is to lead, or what power of reality the religious sentiment is to have in the absence of a positive faith and of every poetical myth, especially when bereft of that communion of the soul with God which appears after all to be its ground and necessary sustenance.

Are not the great artists of religion, and often too the great toilers in practical religious life, virtual mystics? They strive to curb their natural inclinations, to abandon themselves to the divine will, and to unite their soul with God, using to this end the forces which other men expend on the ordinary labors and enjoyments of life. Whatever passions human beings possess they consume in

¹ Félix Kuhn, *Le christianisme de Luther* (Paris, Fischbacher).

the accomplishment of their moral ideals, we know not at the price of what inward struggles and physical tribulations.

But is it not true that religion loses its color and warmth when we pass from sentiment to intellect, from the heart to the brain? History and observation prove it. It is not, therefore, indifferent to the success of a religion,—this waning of the mystical disposition, or rather this diversion, notably for the benefit of art, of that strange energy springing from the sources of our being which the goal of saintship or proselytism formerly claimed entire.

Further, the decline of mysticism goes hand in hand with the ruin of the mystical method of knowledge. Scientific discipline is gradually gaining the upper hand, being demanded by conditions of work in modern societies. The possibility is now less easily conceived of two methods of knowledge, of which one consists in the mysterious operation of grace, or more simply in deductions *a priori*. A process of intuition and pure logic can scarcely be imagined which should give results acceptable in the face of the facts of positive and objective experience; and this question pushed to its limits is perhaps the critical case of metaphysics, if not also of philosophy. But let us take care not to decide this grave question; the religious fact, intuition is a fact, a valid and undeniable experience.

Ordinary believers, it is true, are not burdened with grave anxieties of this sort; their convictions, born of habit and tranquil apathy, do not appear to me to have either gained or lost in power. Their belief remains what it has always been, a body of vague ideas in which the notions of God and soul alone assume prominence; although even these do not often or efficaciously influence their conduct.

The dearest of all to the hearts of women is the belief in immortality, and it is this same hope of a future life that gains for spiritism so many followers. Among philosophers themselves it is known that some have gone so far as to retain the doctrine of personal survival whilst abandoning or diminishing the importance of the idea of God. But in this last respect I am struck with the great difference of the situation between the French Catholic and

the American Protestant, such as Professor Leuba has portrayed the latter in his inquiry.¹

A striking change is indicated by him in the affective relations of man to the divinity. "Freedom and equality," he says, "are in modern society the key-note of the relation of the individual to his fellow-men; it seems to be becoming also the key-note of his relations to God. The feeling of freedom towards God has largely supplanted the duty-motive which the Catechisms continue to inculcate: action in obedience to God's command is out of fashion; it is what is right and what is best which is now the favorite reason for conduct. Even a certain feeling of equality, monstrous as this may seem, has passed into the attitude of the people to God: awe, reverence, worship, appear only dimly and not as frequently as is assumed, in the religious consciousness of the democratic Anglo-Saxon."

The case is certainly different with the French Catholic. He hopes for nothing from God save by submission, and he never seeks to force the divine assistance save by prayer. A "sentiment of impotence" which has doubtless also its dignity causes him to bend his knee and holds him in the hands of his Master, who is his stay and his compassion.

Among many persons who have remained believers, we have noticed an entire abandonment of religious practices. The usual cause of their disaffection is the weak personality of certain preachers or monks, sometimes also the attitude of the clergy and their political machinations. I know many pious persons, and even clergymen, who are foremost in denouncing the puerile devotions, greed, commercialism, and misconduct so frequently laid to the charge of the clergy; and we have here one of the main reasons of the hostility that turns from the attack of the unworthy or incompetent servitors of religion to the attack of religion itself. The severity of the public judgment is gauged by the importance of the rôle played, and the gravity of the deception is measured by the object of the calling.

¹ See *The Monist*, July, 1901.

As to the moral effects of religious teaching, the reader will doubtless have made the observation in reading so many pages filled with good intentions that life would be incomparably better and ethics higher in religious circles if the acts conformed at all closely to the intentions; but this is not the case, and many of our believers are subject to illusions on this point. The idea which they have of good conduct, even when they do not realise it fully, may nevertheless restrain them from falling to a lower level. Several, we have seen, have the feeling that their passions would overpower them if they were not checked by their belief. They undoubtedly slander themselves and are seeking for an argument in favor of an ethics founded on their religion; but their confession is sincere in many cases, and the moralists who deny to religious education so powerful an influence for good, ought at least to accord to it the merit of preventing some evil.

To sum up, what we ordinarily find is the constancy of faith received in childhood, and the return to that faith when shattered for a time or neglected in the course of life.

Among so many examples, I may be permitted to cite that of a master of narration who recently died.¹ His end forms a strange contrast with the spirit of a Parisian journalist, skeptic, and scoffer. When he felt his end approaching, he returned to the religious faith and practices of his early years; every night he repeated his prayers before the curate of his parish, whom he had summoned. One of his old comrades² having come to visit him, he said: "Old fellow, I thank you for having come; I press your hand for the last time." And when his friend sought to comfort him, he continued: "Do not seek to deceive me. *My sacrifice has been made.*" Words profoundly Christian and Catholic, remarked his friend to me,—“words which I heard pronounced by my mother and my father on their death-bed. How they impressed me coming from his mouth, me who have known him for thirty years!”

We have here a man reared in the Catholic faith. This man

¹ Aurelian Scholl.

² M. le Marquis de Charnacé, who told me the story of this last visit and has permitted me to use his name here.

left his native province, entered the paths of journalism, and became a hero of the boulevard. He wrote of everything, but probed no question to the bottom. Everything religious remained indifferent to him as long as he enjoyed his youth and his health and could indulge in unlimited hopes. The fatal hour sounded at last; then the memories of his childhood and of forgotten sentiments came to life again. The metaphysical animal, always concealed deep within every one of us, awakened in him; the dream of his artificial life was dissipated; the two ends of his existence met, over and above the futile agitation that had filled it.

Things are different with the man who has lived a life of serious thought and ripe deliberation, or with one who has not received a religious education in childhood. Such a one, Littré for example, may in his last hours make a concession to his family but not be *converted* in the real meaning of the term. What we do not find, or very seldom find, is the return to Catholicism of a mind which has been long emancipated, or the conversion of a non-believer.

The same remark applies to Protestantism, and we may see in these facts an indication for the future. Statistics do not inform us regarding the process of the dissolution of belief, of which we have gathered such striking testimonies; let us be on our guard, therefore, against supposing that this process has not its limit or its offset, and to conclude without further reflection that its effects are always beneficial.

We have seen that there exists with us, as with all nations, a mass of men and women having superstitions without true faith and observing the rules of their creeds without participation of the heart, a mass docile to all influences and ready to fall to the lowest plane the moment they are not supported by habit and by the commandments imposed upon them. It would be as dangerous to withdraw from this class their support as it would be foolhardy to affect disdain for the ancient beliefs which satisfied so many lofty and noble souls.

That which ought to perish will perish. Time will always accomplish the ruin which our hand is so eager to inaugurate. Violence never leads to success in the battle of religious ideas; liberty

of conscience is a better guarantee of peace than force, and individuals always know how to find ingenious compromises when a partisan law would embroil everything.

It is not without dismay that I hear philosophers condemning the despotism of morals and of the family and proclaiming the ruin of the ideas in which so many find repose; or authors and playwrights presenting to their public personalities bereft of every notion of duty and of every serious character in life. Instead of such a state of mind representing the expansion and liberation of the individual, I fear it marks its deterioration and servitude. I see what is sought to be eradicated from the modern soul, but I do not see what can be added to it for its enrichment. Everything that hitherto constituted the grandeur of man,—sacrifice, devotion, and heroism,—is supposed to serve no purpose. The sentiments that we prized so highly,—filial piety, respect, virtue, and patriotism,—are declared to be illusory and perishable. We imagine abrogated at a blow and by a miracle of evolution the soul which evolution itself has created. We transport ourselves bodily to an age in the future in which all things of to-day—institutions and even persons—shall no longer be what they now are, in which everything shall be changed,—thoughts and habits, passions and desires. We suffer ourselves to be enraptured by the mirage of an approaching age of gold, just as blind and uncritical as the ideologues and verbose poets of the centuries past. We are again reconstructing on paper the world and life, with never a thought for present living humanity.

I do not wish to say that there is nothing sound and acceptable in the criticisms and ambitions of philosophers. The world is involved in continual change. The true meaning of the modifications that are going forward must be apprehended so that we may lend to them the right assistance. It is an ancient proverb that we destroy only what we replace. It is no longer the right of any one to control by his individual action the movement of ideas and facts. The task of comprehending them is in itself difficult enough, and each one of us may find in this field subject for ample reflection.

PARIS.

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