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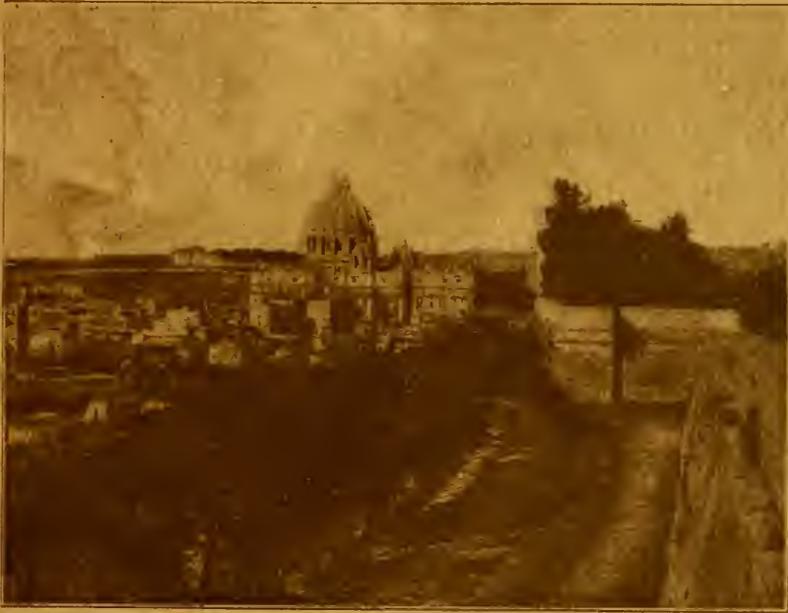
The Open Court

A MONTHLY MAGAZINE

Devoted to the Science of Religion, the Religion of Science, and the
Extension of the Religious Parliament Idea

Editor: DR. PAUL CARUS.

Associates: { E. C. HEGELER.
 { MARY CARUS.



ST. PETER'S.

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MODERNISM IN AMERICA.

BY AN AMERICANIST.

FATHER Tyrrell, less than a year before his too early death, said, speaking of Modernism in America: "I cannot understand America. With its freedom and intelligence, its representatives ought to be in the forefront of the Modernist movement. Yet Modernism has produced there hardly an echo. The Church in America is asleep; and I can conceive nothing that will awaken it, but the production of some book native to the soil, which will raise so loud a cry of reform that all who have ears must hear."

The disappointment expressed in these words has been felt and uttered by practically all the leading Modernists of Europe. On his visit here two years ago, Houtin said that Roman Catholicism in this country was in almost primeval darkness, and all but blind to what shall probably be considered one of the most momentous agitations of Christian history. Loisy in his mild way has wondered at the lack of intellectual activity among American Catholics, and Ehrhardt has expressed himself on the subject in terms of summary contempt, declaring in substance that the Church in America has yet to show the first sign of the possession of scholarship in the face of modern problems.

The astonishment and regret of these men are perfectly natural. They are engaged in a movement for a religious life which shall be intelligent and free. They are seeking to prove that religion is greater than the formulas which once were thought adequate to express it; that the life of the spirit is not of so contemptible a value as to be menaced because a text is shown to be spurious, or a devout legend unmasked; and that in seeking religious truth the intelligence of mankind ought not to be submitted to the coercion of any external authority, save the sovereign authority of critical and scientific evidence. What was more to be expected then, than that

they should look for support to America, and to their co-religionists in America? Whence could a more zealous advocacy of Modernism have rightly been anticipated? To what other country could a movement for emancipation, intellectual and spiritual, turn with more confident assurance? The assurance was all the greater, as from among us had appeared Modernism's precursor, Americanism. The late Pope condemned tendencies, which he said existed here, toward an undue independence, a restiveness under venerable restraints, and a general attitude of novelty, of experiment, and of modernizing. And it cannot be doubted that these admonitions of January, 1899, were received here with considerably more coolness than was to the fancy of the Papal court.

For one thing the Italian theologians were thoroughly unfortunate in the name they chose to affix to our domestic shortcomings. Americanism is a word that connotes patriotism. It seems to embrace all that is indigenous to this republic and is typical of it; and whatever becomes of Biblical criticism, or the philosophy of dogmatic conformity, the mass of Catholics in this country will not be un-American. So the *Testis benevolentiae*, which laid Rome's solemn disapproval upon Americanism, was not received with enthusiasm, and raised indeed in some quarters a levity not far removed from disdain which fitted ill with the letter's august source. It assuredly loosened rather than tied more firmly the bonds uniting America to Rome. Accordingly, when Modernism arose—again a word of singularly unhappy invention for its authors—the world felt sure that those who had been Americanists would make the easy transition and become Modernists. But we have produced no Modernists of eminence, though there are American names in the martyrology of the movement, and to this day this apparent inconsistency, this lack of response to the message of the greater prophets, in a country which prepared the way by its minor prophets, are a puzzle and a pain to the men who are so valiantly fighting the battle oversea.

It is worth while to look into the reasons for this condition of things, which undoubtedly is to the disadvantage of religious progress, and to venture a forecast as to the probable fortunes of Modernist Catholicism in the years to come.

But before going to the heart of the matter, a word must be said concerning the magnitude of this question of Modernism. It is not a squabble *intra parietes*, one of the petty ecclesiastical quarrels which the student of large problems can afford to despise. It is fundamentally a great question of spiritual liberty, attended, as

advancing liberty nearly always is, with the tragic element of suffering, as men strive to reach forward to the new light of the intellect while not relinquishing the ancient loyalties of the heart. It has brought a crisis perhaps of life and death to the mightiest religious organization that has ever existed among men. It aims at a restatement of the creed, a revolutionary change in the external polity, and a regeneration of the inner spirit of the mother-church of Christendom. Upon the issue of it depends, to an extent which those who know the movement best are most inclined to magnify, the future place of Roman Catholicism in the history of civilization.

Will the Church, which was once the arbiter of Europe, turn aside from traditions of secular ambition and authority? Will the great tribunal which retains its Index, still a power, and its Inquisition, now a shadow, say to the scholar: "I will not interfere with you; be free!" and to the heretic: "I will not anathematize you: be sincere!"? Will the institution which, claiming absolute infallibility, has moulded the minds of its devout adherents to total submissiveness, modify its claim, and relax the obedience in which it holds half the civilized world? These are the questions raised by Modernism. This is the crisis which has wrung a cry of terror from the present Pope. And the crisis is of so impressive a magnitude, extending indeed to other orthodoxies over and beyond the Roman; it is so full of possibilities for the religious history of the future that the interest in it must appeal not only to the Roman Catholic, but to every man reflective enough to read history in the events that happen before his eyes.

Why then has the Church in the United States taken so small a part in the agitation? Principally for two reasons: "First, Modernism, while not wholly, is predominantly, an intellectual movement. It began in Biblical criticism with Loisy, Lagrange, and Minocchi, all under the influence of German scholarship. It pushed its researches into the history of dogma and comparative religion, with Cumont, Turmel, and Batiffol. And it ended in philosophy, with an attempt at reconstruction and reconciliation, under the leadership of Blondel, Laberthonnière, Le Roy, and Tyrrell. Now any movement of distinctively academic parentage will be slow in penetrating either the clergy or the laity of the Roman Catholic Church in America. It is a simple fact that among them critical studies are in a state of infancy. The Catholic University at Washington, the best institution of that Church for furnishing an introduction to the methods of criticism, has only a handful of students, and the professors have repeatedly deplored the lack of

interest in their school. And, to come to the most conspicuous as well as to an absolutely decisive proof that the Church in this country is intellectually backward, in all the voluminous literature of Biblical criticism, the history of dogmas and religions, and the philosophy of religious phenomena, not a single work of competence and authority has yet been produced by an American Catholic, and the books that reach even the second class are hardly more than half a dozen.

There are, of course, mitigating circumstances. The clergy here are busy with the rough work of building up a rapidly growing Church; and—a fact not less important—the Church in this young nation has no traditions of scholarship, no generations of illustrious thinkers and teachers, as Europe has, and in consequence it lacks one of the most powerful inspirations to a life of study and research.

There is another less creditable reason which cannot be ignored. A few years ago at a meeting of Catholic educators in Milwaukee, two papers were read, written by priests who had had long experience in the direction of seminaries, which declared with a frankness that quite stunned the college officials present, especially the Jesuits among them, that the men sent up to the seminaries by Catholic colleges are in a condition of almost scandalous unfitness for prosecuting the higher studies of an ecclesiastical course. The indictment—for it was nothing less—stated that not only were these candidates deficient in positive erudition, but that they were mentally untrained, unable to grasp a problem, incapable of thinking for themselves, and formulating an independent personal conclusion on a matter of scholarship. The complaint was new only in the daring method of announcing it. It had been made years before in a less public manner, and is made still, by the professors of the Catholic University. Obviously a condition thus criticised must change before a fundamentally critical movement like Modernism can get a fair start.

The other reason why American Catholics have not investigated Modernism, even after the word and the thing became famous, is that we have had here neither a noteworthy book on the subject from a native pen, nor a *cause célèbre*. In Europe, not only is Modernist literature extensive, but Catholics have seen one review after another suppressed by Rome, eminent professors driven from their chairs, scholarly priests suspended with startling frequency, and condemnations of divers degrees of ecclesiastical severity striking down the best-known representatives of Catholic scholarship. Inevitably these agitations set intelligent persons thinking and investi-

gating. The air was and is full of the subject; and for an educated European Catholic not to know something about Modernism, has become almost as much out of the question as it would have been for an American of Civil War times not to follow the fortunes of Grant and Lee. With us the case is entirely different. No book has appeared here; no magazine has been founded; no anathema hurled; no scholar publicly silenced. We have made a solitude and we call it peace. The excitement reaches us only as it dies away in echo. Modernism has not been brought home to America.

Shall it ever be brought home? We think so; and believe it will be in the manner suggested in the keen remark of Father Tyrrell quoted at the head of this article. The very air and soil of America are favorable to Modernism, as to all other movements that make for intelligence, strength, sincerity and independence. We know what the American spirit is in the political and social order. Translate it into the religious order, and you have Modernism at its best and purest.

The Church in the United States simply needs to know Modernism; then we may be sure, before long it will embrace it. The question is how best to teach it? How acquaint a clergy and laity, more or less indifferent to critical studies, with the problems which Modernism raises?

In the opinion of the writer of this article, a beginning should be made with Americanism. That is to say, the man who sets himself to that sore need of progress—the teaching of Modernism to Roman orthodoxy in this country—should put in the forefront of his work the contrasting attitudes of America and Rome toward the three fundamental ideas of personal liberty, especially liberty of conscience, separation of church and state, and freedom of opinion and research. These three principles constitute an Americanism which all who are true Americans indorse, Catholics as well as non-Catholics. Yet all three are condemned in the most explicit manner by the official theology of the Vatican. The American Catholic who sees this, who has it driven home to him by documents the most formal, and facts the most sure, will get his first awakening to the existence in the infallible church of elements which are out of harmony with progress and modernity. He will perceive that there is need for reform, and that his help should be given to the men who are fighting for reform. Above all, his mind shall have been thus prepared for the discussion of the graver questions of historical criticism which form the central fortress of Modernism. To have

seen the need of change in the lesser, is but one step short of acknowledging the necessity of improvement in the greater.

A few carefully selected examples of critical processes, as these pertain to the Bible and to the evolution of dogma, will open the eyes to the crisis which scholarship and truth have brought upon the creeds. It will appear that the catechism and the manual of dogmatic theology are not the last words of wisdom; that the old-fashioned cast-iron literalism in interpreting Scriptural texts and doctrinal formulas, must give way to a saner, freer, and more spiritual manner of approaching these things; and that, as the Church once assimilated Platonism, and later Aristotelianism, to the extent of expressing her dogmas in the terminology of these systems, so is there to-day a call for new formulations in conformity with the assured results of modern criticisms and religious philosophy. To put the case in a few words, such a work of awakening as Father Tyrrell looked for, should be, not a treatise on one or other specialized aspect of criticism, but a sort of prolegomena to the study of Roman Catholicism as confronted by modern civilization and scholarship. Only a book of this description, covering the ground from reforms that are roughly practical and disciplinary, to those that are dogmatic and radical, will do the required work of education, and give any notable assistance to the formation in the United States, of an intelligent and earnest sympathy for the men who are striving to save all that is best in the most stringent of orthodoxies from the wreck that threatens the entire establishment.