

When You Want to be Convinced. III.

(Put down yesterday's Bulletin on Henry Fairfield Osborne as Chapter II of the series "When you want to be convinced." Chapter III delves into history a bit. The material is from a lecture by Alfred Rahilly before the Catholic students of University College Cork, published in Studies, September, 1917.)

What causes men of great minds to lose the Faith? People are puzzled to find disagreement on fundamentals among men of much learning. When one finds great scientists, historians and philosophers in the ranks of unbelievers, he may come to the conclusion that these men have been led away from God by their studies. That this has not been so with many notorious unbelievers will be clear from the following examples:

Gibbon.

In the hymn sung at the Offertory last Sunday, "Adoro Te Devote," St. Thomas Aquinas exclaims: "Visus, gustus, tactus in Te fallitur -- sed auditu solo tuto creditur;" "sight, taste and touch alike deceived, hearing alone may be believed." With the testimony of three senses against the Real Presence outweighed by the evidence of one sense, St. Thomas exclaims: "I believe whatever the Son of God has said, for nothing is truer than His Word."

Five hundred years later Gibbon, at the mature age of seventeen, made the "discovery" of which he tells us in the following paragraph from his Memoirs:

"I still remember my solitary transport at the discovery of a philosophical argument against the doctrine of transsubstantiation: that the text of scripture which seems to inculcate the real presence is attested only by a single sense -- our sight; while the real presence itself is disproved by three of our senses -- the sight, the touch and the taste. The various articles of the Romish creed disappeared like a dream; and after a full conviction, on Christmas Day, 1754, I received the sacrament in the church of Lausanne. It was here that I suspended my religious inquiries, acquiescing with implicit belief in the tenets and mysteries which are adopted by the general consent of Catholics and Protestants."

And then, with religious inquiry stopped, Gibbon turned his talent to searching history and Scripture for texts to pervert to blasphemy of Christ. His "transport" came because he found what he was looking for: a single silly argument to bolster up the unbelief that was knocking at the door of his heart. Seventeen is a dangerous age, and when a young man of seventeen is looking for principles to justify conduct, he is quite apt to suffer a "transport" at the discovery of an argument, no matter how stupid, that will oppose the authority of the Ten Commandments. When you want to be convinced.....

Berthelot.

Berthelot was an unbeliever before he was a chemist. His bosom friend, Renan, says:

"Berthelot had from his father a remnant of Christian beliefs. Some months sufficed to relegate these vestiges of faith to the portion of our souls consecrated to reminiscences..... The clean scientific view of a universe in which no free-will higher than man's acts in any appreciable way, became, since the first months of 1846, the unshakeable anchor which we have never left." -- Berthelot was 18 when he cast anchor.

PRAYERS: Charlie O'Connell, for whose recovery we have prayed for the last year, wires that his mother is very sick. Three students ask prayers for sick persons. A priest asks urgent prayers for the conversion of a person who is lying at the point of death. Billie Loughran, of Freshman Hall, lost his sister yesterday.