

really active minds, is the great problem of human existence, good and evil, right and wrong, what? whence? whither. And what has unaided reason done towards the solution of this transcendent problem, which he justly calls "the great object of human thought?" The answer is, nothing whatever. The only result of "continually seeking to know," Mr. Herbert Spencer announces, is "a deepened conviction of the impossibility of knowing." Such are the cheerful triumphs of reason when it pretends to be "all or nothing." Far from affording the slightest assistance in determining "the great problem of human existence," it not only confesses its own impotence, but affect to rejoice in it. It makes total ignorance at once a duty and a privilege. "It is alike our highest wisdom," continues Mr. Spencer, "and our highest duty to regard that through which all things exist as *The Unknowable*."

If this is what reason always comes to when it is made "all or nothing," does not this uniformity of result, at once so dismal and so ludicrous, suggest the idea that perhaps it has been improperly used? Since reason thus employed gives no help whatever towards solving the most urgent question ever proposed to human intelligence, and always ends by frankly confessing its own failure, may there not be something else, as Plato suspected, which is able to supplement its incapacity? The question is eminently practical. The most vigorous intellects in all ages, including our own, have answered it in the affirmative. They not only profess to have solved "the great problem of human existence," but tell us how it is done. The countless volumes in which they speak of *faith* and its objects are among the most splendid monuments of human genius. Faith, they tell us, is a gift which never contradicts right reason, though it takes cognisance of truths which lie outside its sphere. It is an intellectual gift, but wholly distinct from mere reason, not subject to its deplorable aberrations, and quite as strong in the most illiterate peasant as in the greatest philosopher. Unnumbered millions, of all races and tongues, have found by actual experience that this is true.

The gentleman who writes in the 'Pall Mall Gazette' does not see it. He would rather that what he calls his "reason" should detain him in eternal darkness than ascend into the region of light by the aid of Faith. Nobody will interfere with his choice. "Elephants," he says, "will not breed in captivity," and he "would rather give up the process of thinking altogether" than confine his own elephantine reason within "the prison-yard which the Pope and his priests have marked out as its place of exercise." He will not herd with such captives as St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Bernard, and St. Philip Neri. He knows, but is not much impressed by the fact, that a very distinguished dweller in that prison-yard, who never suspected that he was in prison, was not ashamed to submit his vast intellect to the control of faith and the infallible authority of the Church. Bossuet understood that He to whom we belong has as much right to the submission of our reason as of our will. "It never occurred to him," our journalist observes, "that it was not the proper function of the Church to hamper human reason." We doubt if he did. Bossuet who had almost as much genius as the lawyers of the "Pall Mall Gazette," and who will be read with admiration long after the last number of that instructive print has been consumed as waste paper, would have told his critic that the proper function of the Church is not to hamper reason, but to save it from committing suicide. He knew, as other men of genius had known, that she is the guardian of certain revealed truths, which do not tolerate questions simply because they are revealed. He knew also that if they are received by faith, on the authority of the Church, they are not received simply because she teaches them. To many she taught them in vain. Infidels and heretics often know what she teaches, but do not receive it, because they do not possess what Holy Scripture calls "the precious gift of faith." Christians, of whatever nation, do receive it, not by constraint, but virtue of that interior illumination which faith kindles in the soul. All who have it, of whatever race or nation, are conscious of it, feel its power, exult in its supernatural light. When the sort of people who write in the 'Pall Mall Gazette' tell them that they cannot have it, because there is no such thing, they only see, in such delirious speech, a fresh proof of the unutterable misery of those who have it not.

The testimony of those who possess the gift of faith outweighs the ignorant scepticism of those who do not. Even Sir William Hamilton confessed that "Knowledge is an inferior ground of assurance to natural belief." Like Plato, he saw that to determine the problem of human existence something else is wanted besides reason. A man who can seriously affirm, like the writer in the 'Pall Mall Gazette,' that reason must be all or nothing," knows as little about reason as he does about faith; and when he adds that the existence of certain fixed truths, revealed by God and witnessed by the Church, "hampers reason," it is as if he contended that a lighthouse is the confusion of mariners, and a hindrance to the navigation of the sea. It would not be more absurd to maintain that the postulates of the geometrician close the door of his own science. It is not faith which obscures reason, but the want of it. Faith in the truths of Revelation never impede the progress of true science, and never will. In our own age, as in every other, there is not a branch of human knowledge which is not as eagerly investigated by the Catholic as by the unbelieving or heretical student, with the full approval and acquiescence of the Church; but as reason, according to Kant, is "subject to inevitable delusion," and continually substitutes its own assumptions for facts, and hardly any two modern philosophers are of one mind, it is an enormous advantage to the Catholic that he alone possesses a test by which the capricious conclusions of "reason" can be checked and corrected. The foolish newspapers, which say one thing to-day and another to-morrow, and think that man's noblest privilege is the right to be deceived, may tell their readers that the Church hampers reason, but they only display their own incurable folly. The Church, as even Mr. Froude remarks, had for centuries "the monopoly of learning." What she fears is not knowledge, but

ignorance; and as to liberty, whether of the intellect or the conscience, the experience of our own age proves that people who wish to curtail both always begin by attacking the authority which is able to defend both. "If we take a broad view," says Mr. Lecky, in his book on Rationalism, "of the history of liberty since the establishment of Christianity, we find that the ground of conflict was at first personal, and at a later period political liberty, and that in the earlier stage the Catholic Church was the special representative of progress." Such is the confession even of non-Catholics like Ranke, Guizot, Hallan, and Macaulay, when their own judgment is not fatally blinded by an ignoble bondage to a sect, a school, or a party. "It is historically certain," says Dr. Nevin, a well-known American Lutheran minister, in the 'Mercerburg Review,' "that European society, as a whole, in the period before the Reformation, was steadily advancing in the direction of a rational, safe liberty." If in our own day liberty is everywhere menaced, it is not by the Church, but by her enemies. They perfectly understand, in Berlin and elsewhere, that if they want to gag liberty they must first get rid of her.

The newspapers dispute this truth. They know that if people should ever recognize it their occupation would be gone. They live, and design to live, by flattering the prejudices of the many. If the Irish Bishops publish a noble protest against the gross philosophy proclaimed the other day in Belfast, the 'Times,' instead of thanking them, flippantly observes that "the public need only inquire under whose guidance science reached this point, at which she now commands the attention of the Roman Catholic Church, and compels the Pope to bless colleges founded to teach the doctrines of Galileo." Its readers will, no doubt, be quite content with this specimen of what Charles Lamb calls "superficial omniscience." It is, however, just possible that some of them may have read Dr. Gladstone's essay on *Points of Supposed Collision between Scripture and Natural Science*. He also discusses the case of Galileo, but is not quite so shallow and uncritical as the 'Times,' perhaps because he appealed to more exacting readers. "The Reformed Church," he observes, "sided with the Vatican in this matter, and had we been living in the beginning of the seventeenth century, we too should have felt that the difficulty was a serious one." The difficulty of which the Church was bound to take account in the interest of human souls has passed away, and now, as Dr. Gladstone adds, "the Copernican theory is taught alike in Protestant schools of divinity and in Jesuit colleges." This is a mode of treating the subject which would not have suited the 'Times,' because it tends to remove, and not to confirm, ignorant and unreflecting prejudice. When we see how the writers in the Protestant newspapers, whether secular or ostensibly religious, use what they call their "reason," and to what results it conducts them, we understand what the French editor of St. Thomas meant when he said: "Le monde a encore plus besoin de la raison que de la foi."—'Tablet.'

ALSACE AND IRELAND.

VAE VICTIS!

A SPECIAL correspondent of a Paris paper—M. Wachter, who is himself a native of Strasbourg—has just given an account of the system of Germanizing Alsace, which is likely to make Frenchmen grave. M. Wachter says:—"The progress already made alarms me. I did not think it possible to change in two years the appearance of a town as they have changed Strasbourg." The means by which this transformation has been effected are: the German university, encouragement to German immigration, encouragement to French immigration, expulsion of teaching priests, and compulsory use of German in the schools. M. Wachter declares that the result must be fatal to French loyalty in time, for the little children are learning German and no other tongue.

How like an oft-told tale this news appears to an Irishman who knows the history of his country. The same process is being pursued in Alsace as Ireland has endured during the last six or seven centuries—but notably during the last two. How vast must be the difference between the peoples. Four years have scarcely elapsed since the Prussians conquered Alsace; those who were children then are children still; the fresh marks of conflict are pointed out on the walls and windows of the cities; the veterans of the war are young men still; but a French observer sadly declares that already the loyalty of Alsace to France is being sapped, "for the little children are learning German and no other tongue."

Well we know that tyrants ever, with an art from darkness sprung, strove to make the conquered nations slaves alike in limb and tongue.

But the banishment of a language cannot banish love and loyalty from the hearts of a brave race. In this early day of her sorrow let Alsace look to Ireland for strength to resist. Let her see there a people who have indeed changed their language, but who have used the tongue of the conqueror to register their wrongs and perpetuate their love for fatherland. The Irish were forced to see their grand old language fade before their eyes "like the leaves upon the trees;" but no man could say until this day that patriotism or hope faded with it.

We are sorry to see a land with so much Celtic blood as Alsace must contain, sink into contempt in the space of four years. We fear the Prussian element across the Rhine must have been stronger than was thought. In a few years more even in one generation—when Prussia writes the "History of the War" for the schools of Alsace, we may expect to see the conquered province leading the Prussian States in anti-Gallic hatred. How wise were the words of Mr. Hunter at the meeting of the Southern Historical Society in Richmond a few weeks ago: "Wo! to the people who leave it to their conquerors to write the history of the contest."—'Pilot.'

At Romford four children have been fatally poisoned by having teething powder given to them.