

EDITORIAL

Some of us perhaps have a dim recollection from our school days of a mathematical exercise known as cancelling out. It was also called the resolving or the simplifying of factors. The dog-eared, ink-stained text book, when it wished to prepare us for problems of this kind, would bid us quite bluntly, without a 'Please' or 'By your leave,' 'simplify the following.' The following was generally a crazy heap of figures, piled up sometimes in the perilous attitude of an inverted pyramid. If you took the main dividing line for the earth level, you could imagine an irregular building of sky-scraping proportions with an equally erratic basement beneath. The process of simplification—not always as simple as it sounded—involved the striking out of numerator against denominator and *vice-versa* until the storeys of your imaginary building became lower and lower, the compartments of your cellars rose earthwards, and finally, if you were lucky, subsided into one another, leaving you only a few miserable figures or, more often than not, nothing at all. To the long-suffering pupils it always seemed to be making much ado about nothing, and even as puzzles these sums were failures. They seemed to have been invented to tease and tantalize unoffending youths, or if indeed they had any moral purpose, it must have been to keep us out of mischief, or to give us scope for practising patience in adversity, cheerfulness in affliction and other necessary virtues.

But age brings knowledge: and we have since learned that cancelling out can be applied to larger factors than those to be found in the school books and, far from being a somewhat fatuous occupation suitable for killing time during school hours, it is so

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valuable an art that we are more than grateful to our pedagogues who had the wisdom and insight to see that we are equipped with it.

Let me give an example of cancelling out applied to ordinary life and things.

Huxley in one of his Lay Sermons was moved to speak of 'our great antagonist—I speak as a man of science—the Roman Catholic Church, the one spiritual organisation which is able to resist, and must as a matter of life and death resist, the progress of science and modern civilisation.' He had been paying a visit to Maynooth, the world-famous establishment for the education of the priests of Ireland. He was greatly impressed by all he saw. 'It seemed to me,' he said, 'that the difference between these men and the comfortable champions of Anglicanism and Dissent was comparable to the difference between our gallant volunteers and the trained veterans of Napoleon's Old Guard. The Catholic priest is trained to know his business, and do it effectually . . . The heresies of the day are explained to them (the Maynooth students) by their professors of philosophy and science, and they are taught how these heresies are to be met . . . I heartily respect an organisation which faces its enemies in this way: and I wish that all ecclesiastical organisations were in as effective a condition.'

Now this unsolicited testimonial from Huxley is very interesting, and it becomes still more interesting if it is read by one who has also read a book—reviewed some months ago in these pages—entitled *Reminiscences of a Maynooth Professor*, by Dr. Walter McDonald. Very many of Dr. McDonald's pages are written to support the contention that Maynooth, as he knew it, was by no means adequately equipped in modern science or philosophy: its young men came out none too well fitted for warfare against the heresies of the day. Some will side with Huxley, others will

support Dr. McDonald. Others again may like to make Huxley their numerator and Dr. McDonald their denominator and try their hand at simplifying so unusual a vulgar fraction.

Anyone with a taste for simplifying factors of this kind will not have to seek far for examples. For we find our foes perpetually praising us for our excellence upon points where our friends say we are deficient. Here is another numerator—a quotation from one of the late Canon Sheehan's books: 'The Catholic theologian is the best merchant, but the poorest shopkeeper in the world. He has countless riches, but he does not know how to use or display them.' By way of denominator, while I am reflecting on the wisdom of this, comes a substantial book called *The Official Report of the National Catholic Congress, Manchester, 1926*.¹

Cold water was thrown on the enthusiasm I expressed on the happy thought that had inspired the promoters of the Congress to prepare this wonderful array of Catholic activities. 'Mere display! Window dressing! Why don't we get on with our business quietly and humbly, with less talk, less self-congratulation, less fuss, and less parade?' Perhaps it will begin to appear what is meant by cancelling out. Canon Sheehan says that the priests have the goods which they cannot display; and on the other hand it is urged that the displaying is overdone, the show cases are deceptive and out of proportion to the goods in stock.

Well, if one must use these undignified commercial metaphors, then I would dare to say that window dressing is for the Catholic Church in this country a very necessary apostolic act. There are more attractive ways of describing it, and there are metaphors that have a more sacred sanction; for instance, let your light shine before men, and hide not a candle under a

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bushel. If the National Congress does nothing more than bring the Church and its innumerable works before our own eyes and before the eyes of the citizens of a great city like Manchester, or if it only shows us that the Church is something that exists in England, that it is a feature in the national life and not merely a parochial affair, then every effort expended in its organising is more than justified. A Congress of this kind is quite unblushingly a parade of Catholic life and Catholic forces; it is a review of work done; it is an incentive to further effort; it is something of which those who imagine themselves to be our foes may well be envious. The wistful outsider, jealous of this disciplined unity of purpose, which he thinks wasted on the cause we have at heart, sees only an elaborate, human organisation. He praises it as a human thing. The friendly critic who is fearful of too much ostentation and parade is also condemning a human thing. And when we have thanked our foe for his praise and our friend for his criticism, and balanced one human thing with another, we are left very much where we were.

After all our cancelling out, with what are we left? Is it not the old story of the school-books? $X = I$ or O . Humanly considered the Church is, as she professes to be, a negligible quantity. Divinely considered she is not only One, she is Catholic, which means Everything.

So every question concerning the Church resolves itself : Everything or nothing.

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