

FIRST PART.

ON THE TRUTHS WHICH MUST BE BELIEVED.

CATHOLIC ANECDOTES.

CHAPTER 1.

ON MYSTERIES IN GENERAL.

MYSTERIES AND TRUTH

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24. *The Burning Glasses of Archimedes.* -

A mystery is, you know, my friends, a truth which we are bound to believe, although we can neither comprehend nor explain it. Sceptics pretend to say that the mysteries of religion are incredible because they are absurd, and that they are absurd because they are incomprehensible. Well! that reasoning is not based on common sense, because there are hundreds of thousands of facts seen every day, believed and admitted without difficulty, although they are not at all understood. Here is an example: The Romans besieged the city of Syracuse, in Sicily, about 212 years before Christ. Their vessels surrounded the place by sea, so as to cut off all communication with other countries. The Consul Marcellus had been commanding there in person for full two years, and still the siege made little progress. To what was this owing?

I will tell you. Amongst the inhabitants of Syracuse, there chanced to be a learned mechanician, named Archimedes, who had invented mighty machines

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whereby he grievously tormented the Romans. Now he hurled on them masses of rock or stone, which sent their vessels to the bottom; again, he seized their ships and carried them off through the air, pretty much as you would catch a fish with a line. Now you will understand that no one would doubt these things if they had seen them. But there is something more incredible still. Archimedes invented a species of burning glasses, which so well directed the rays of the sun on the Roman fleet, that they set it on fire at a distance of more than 500 metres. Historians have not failed to record this fact, but our chemists and philosophers have laughed it to scorn, as a thing wholly impossible; "it is like the mysteries of religion, we will believe it when we see it." Well, my friends, it has been seen, for, in 1754, the learned Buffon, member of the Academy of Sciences, succeeded in constructing burning glasses like those of Archimedes, and in the month of April, when the sun is not yet strong, he could melt lead and burn wood at a considerable distance. Unbelievers have had their eyes opened, they have seen and were forced to believe. -

G. S. G., *List of Discoveries*, 210.

25. *Subterranean Salt Mines.* -

We sometimes meet with persons who say: "Oh! as for me, I do not believe what I see, but what I comprehend." These people are like the inhabitants of mines, who never go forth from the bowels of the earth, and refuse to believe what is passing in the world. In the neighbourhood of Wieliczka, in Poland, there

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are vast salt mines, which have been worked for more than six hundred years, and were the abodes of entire families for many centuries. In them are constructed houses, galleries, inns and even a church, all of salt. Well! there were children who were born and brought up in these subterranean regions; they had never seen any other lights than their lamps; they knew neither the pure sky, the beauty of the country, nor the marvels of vegetation. If you speak to them of the sun that rises and sets every day, of the succession of day and night, of rivers and lakes, they know not what you mean; they may even suspect, at times, that you are mocking them, unless you chance to be one in whom they have confidence. So it is with the truths and the mysteries of religion; if we are reasonable, we will never say - "I believe only what I see." - NOEL, *Catechisme de Rodez*, I., 136.

26. *Why the Little Finger is Moved at Will.* -

Speaking of mysteries, I will tell you a pretty little story of what happened to a boy of twelve or thirteen years, who was called Antoine, and who knew his Catechism perfectly. One day, going from Nancy to Luneville, he got into a diligence (as the old stage-coaches were called in France), for in those days, children, there were no railroads. In the same compartment with him there chanced to be a lawyer who was somewhat of a gossip, and must have his little word to say, *apropos* to nothing. Going through a village, the stage passed a church, and Antoine was in a great hurry to take off his cap in honour of the Blessed Sacrament.

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"Ha! ha!" said the lawyer. I perceive you go to Catechism; let us see what you learned there." "Sir," replied Antoine modestly, "I learned the principal mysteries." "You did, eh? And what are those mysteries?" "The Holy Trinity, the Incarnation, and the Redemption." "And will you tell me what is the Holy Trinity?" "Sir, it is the mystery of one God in three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost." "And you believe that, do you? If you do, you may believe anything that the priest chooses to tell you. Now, do you see, people should only believe what they understand." "And do you, sir, believe nothing that you don't understand?" "Of course I do not, no intelligent person does." "Will you, then, please to tell me, sir, why it is that your little finger moves when you want it to move?" "Oh! that is easy enough told; it moves because I want to move it, and the life that is in me makes it move." "But why does it move?" "Because I will it." "Yet your ears don't move when you will - how does that happen?" "Nonsense, little boy, you are too young to teach me! I pray you let me alone." The conversation ended there, for the lawyer perceived that the persons present were beginning to laugh at him, whilst applauding the shrewd observations of the young Antoine. - ABBE GRIDEL, *Christian Evenings*, I., 184.

27. *The Mysteries of Nature.* -

I cannot explain mysteries to you, my young friends, because mysteries are above our feeble understanding; but I can

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give you some examples of natural mysteries, which will prove to you that it is not only in religion mysteries are found. You have, doubtless, seen wheat, and may probably know that a single grain is sufficient to produce an ear, which sometimes contains as many as fifty, sixty, eighty; and even one hundred grains. How does it happen that one hundred grains are contained in one? No one can explain, yet every one believes it? Well! my friends, that is what is called a mystery. If your parents were in Paris, in 1849, they probably visited the Exhibition of the agricultural and industrial produce of all France.

Ask them if they saw the large ears of wheat that were shown as a curiosity. I remember a grain of barley, sown in a garden at Disonville, in the Department of Eure-et-Loir, which produced no less than one hundred and seventy-three ears, each ear contained at least seventy-five grains; so that this grain of barley contained in itself 12,795 grains! That surprises you, my dear children; well! it is only another mystery; - we see, we believe, but we know not how it can be. -

- G. S. G.