

GOD THE CREATOR

CATHOLIC ANECDOTES

CHAPTER III.

FIRST ARTICLE OF THE CREED.

I Believe in God the Father Almighty, Creator of Heaven and Earth.

VI. - OF THE ANGELS.

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70. *Hagar in the Desert.* -

Hear the story of Hagar and Ishmael; in it you shall see, my little friends, how the Angels are sent by God to have care over us. Abraham had had a first son by Hagar his bonds-woman and his wife. Seven years after, he had another, named Isaac, by Sara, his free and second wife. These two children were brought up together, but Ishmael was not always as kind as he ought to have been to his brother Isaac; on the contrary, he often teased

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and annoyed him, as is too often seen amongst children of that age, my little friends! Sara could not endure this treatment of her son, and she complained of it to Abraham. The latter having consulted God, resolved to send away his bonds-woman, with his son Ishmael. Rising very early one morning, then, he called them to him, and giving them a loaf of bread, and a pitcher of water, sent them away. Hagar departed sorrowfully, and wandered several days in the solitude of Bersebee. When the water given her by her master was all drank, she expected to die in the desert; then she placed Ishmael under a tree, and lay down herself under another, so as not to see her son die. All at once an Angel appeared to her, and reproached her for her despondency. "Arise!" said he, "take your child by the hand, and bring him up with care, for he shall be the father of a great people." Hagar arose at the bidding of the Angel, and she saw, at the same moment a fair spring of fresh water, which had just burst forth at her side. Thanking God, she went to find her son, and brought him up in that desert, where he became a skilful archer. He himself had, afterwards, twelve sons, and became the progenitor of the great nation of the Arabs.

- *Genesis* Chapter 31.

71. *Raphael Conducts the Young Tobias.* -

The finest example I can give you of the care which our Guardian Angel takes of us is that of Raphael, the sage conductor of young Tobias. The father of that young man feeling himself growing old, summoned him to his bedside,

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and, after some pious admonitions, said to him

"My son, I wish to tell you that when you were yet very young, I lent the sum of ten talents to a man of our tribe, named Gabelus, who dwells now at Rages a town in the country of the Medes. You must go to him for this money, for which here is his own bond." His son, going out into the street, met a young man of pleasing aspect, who appeared ready to start on a journey; he asked him some questions, and learned from him that he knew the way to Rages, and that he even knew Gabelus very well. Young Tobias brought him to his father, who asked him if he was willing to accompany his son. "I will," replied the unknown, who was no other than the Archangel Raphael, "and I will bring him back safe and sound." "May your voyage be happy," cried then the old Tobias, who had been blind for many years; "may God be with you on your way, and may His Angel accompany you!"

They set out after bidding farewell to the old man and his wife, who wept much at parting.

The Angel of the Lord watched carefully, as he had promised, over his young companion. The very first evening of their journey he saved him from a monstrous fish that would have devoured him as he was washing his feet on the bank of the Tigris. At the end of twelve days they arrived at Rages, where they lodged at the house of an Israelite named Raguel.

The Angel then said to young Tobias: "Raguel is of your blood; God has destined his daughter for your wife; if you follow the counsel I will give you

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you shall escape the misfortune that has come on several persons who have already attempted to be married to her. As for Gabelus, he is no longer here; I know where he lives, and will go bring him hither; he shall be present at your wedding, and will give you your money We shall then return to your father and mother who are anxiously expecting you. All was done as the Archangel said; they returned with joy to Nineveh, where the old Tobias dwelt, and restored his sight in a miraculous manner. Finally, when the Angel of the Lord had accomplished his mission, he made himself known, then vanished from the eyes of the astonished and grateful family.

- *Tobias, (Book of Tobit) Chapter 5 et seq.*

72. *The Angels of Judas Maccabeus.* -

You all know, my young friends, the story of the Archangel Raphael who accompanied young Tobias on his journey, and took such particular care of him and his affairs. Sacred History contains many other facts of a similar kind. Here is one that will interest you: Judas Maccabeus, Prince of the Jews, long maintained a difficult war against the King of Syria. Timotheus, general of the Syrians, marched against him in full force. Collecting a large army, principally of foreigners, he led them towards Judea. Hearing this, the Jews were sore afraid, being far inferior in numbers, and they saw that their only hope was in the assistance of Heaven. Prostrate before the altar, with ashes on their heads, Judas and his men besought the Lord to have mercy on them and come to their assistance.

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They then advanced against the Syrians, and at sunrise the two armies met in open field. Valour and determination were equally manifested on both sides, and the victory was still undecided, when all at once were seen coming down from heaven five men, mounted on horses with bridles of shining gold. Three of them put themselves at the head of the little Jewish army, and the other two placed themselves on either side of Judas Maccabeus. A complete victory was, of course, gained over the Syrians; they lost 20,500 men, and 600 horses. Well! these five radiant horsemen were no other than Angels, sent by God to sustain His people in that emergency.

- *II. Maccabees, X., 24-38.*

73. *Little Gregory's Angel Guardian.* -

It is related in the life of St. Gregory, Bishop of Tours, that when he was still a child his father fell dangerously ill. Gregory, who loved him very much, prayed fervently every day for his recovery. One night when he was fast asleep his Angel Guardian appeared to him and said: "My child, you will relieve your father; do what I am going to tell you. When you rise in the morning write the name of **JESUS** on a little piece of wood, and, without saying anything, place it on the pillow under your good father's head. The first thing little Gregory did when he awoke was to run and tell his mother what had been revealed to him by his good Angel Guardian; she charged him to go immediately and do as he had been told. He did so; wrote the name of **JESUS** on

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a small piece of wood, and thrust it gently into his father's pillow. O prodigy! scarcely was it there when the father found himself cured, and Gregory gave thanks to God and his good Angel.

- *St. Gregory of Tours.*

74. *The Angel Guardian of a Child in the Cradle.* -

See, dear children, how carefully our Angel Guardian watches over us. Amongst the French soldiers who fought in the wars of Spain and Portugal under Napoleon I., there was one who related the charming story which I am about to tell you. The French army had reached Villafranca, situated on the Tagus. The soldiers, rambling through the streets of the city, found at the door of a deserted house, a poor little infant not a year old, lying in a cradle. I forgot to tell you that the city had been bombarded by the English; all around were seen ruined buildings, heaps of rubbish, with splinters of shells and bombs, which had penetrated the thickness of the walls. And yet amid all this desolation, the cradle had remained untouched, because the child's Angel Guardian had protected it in a very special manner. The first who perceived the cradle was an old grenadier, who gently raised the covering, and was amazed to see the pretty, smiling infant that lay beneath. Every one wondered at the sight, and the whole regiment must needs see it. A goat was procured to suckle the little orphan and as long as the regiment remained at Villafranca, the men took good care of it. When they were ordered elsewhere, the old grenadier took the cradle

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and child with him; but, finding that he could not keep the infant always, he gave it in charge to a good woman in a neighbouring village, giving her all the money he had about him, and entreating her to take very good care of it till it should be claimed by its parents.

- SCHMID et BELET, *Cat. Hist.*, I., 166.

75. *Holy Guardian Angel, Pray for Her!* -

Oh! my dear children, if you only loved and trusted as you ought, your Angel Guardian, how he might assist you in your greatest difficulties! Here is one instance, of a thousand that could be given, which proves it beyond dispute. It is not an old story, either, for the circumstance occurred in 1843, at Aigen, a small town in the Tyrol, one of the provinces of Austria. It was the 5th of September; a joiner had been piling up some wood which had been brought him; he had built it up to a considerable height, and went to remove the ladder on which he had been standing. Suddenly the pile shakes, the whole mass of wood topples down, and buries under its ruins the joiner's little daughter, but two and a half years old, who was sitting on some chips on the floor. Imagine the despair of the child's parents; they ran in all haste, but their first word, their first feeling was this: "Holy Angel Guardian of our child pray for her!" They hastened to remove the wood using the utmost precaution for fear of new accidents. Every moment seemed an age to these worthy people, who expected nothing else but to find their child lifeless. They were mistaken; their prayer had been

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heard; the little girl had not even a scratch. I need not tell you how thankful they were to the good Angel who had protected her.

- *Gazette Instructive et edificante*, Sept., 1843.

VII. - OF THE DEVIL.

76. *A Note Written to the Devil by a Saint.* -

It is a curious thing to see, children, how weak and powerless the Devil is in presence of a man of faith. A simple sign of the Cross, some drops of holy water, a word even suffices to put him to flight. Listen now to what I am going to tell you. St. Gregory Thaumaturgus was once on his way to Neocesarea, a city of Asia Minor. Being overtaken by a storm, he was obliged to take shelter with his travelling companions in a pagan temple, famous in that country, because the demon gave oracles therein. His first care was to pray to God, invoke Our Lord Jesus Christ and make the sign of the cross several times, to purify the air polluted by the smoke of pagan sacrifice. They spent the night quietly, and set out next morning very early. Meanwhile the sacrificer of the temple came to perform his sacrilegious rites; but in vain did he call upon his gods, the demons only appeared to tell him that they were going to depart from that temple, and had no longer any power there, because of what had taken place over night.

Furious at this result, the pagan priest hastened after St. Gregory and threatened to denounce him to the magistrates,

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for having penetrated into the temple and disturbed its ceremonies. The holy bishop heard him very calmly and merely answered: "Friend, the demon whom you serve is so weak and powerless, that I have only to say one word to make him either depart from a place or return to it again." "If that be so," said the sacrificer, "make him return to the temple." St. Gregory tore a small scrap from his book, and wrote on it these few words: "Gregory to Satan: - Enter!" He gave this note to the priest, who placed it on the altar of the temple, and again commenced his sacrifices; the demons appeared as usual. The priest was so struck by this prodigy, which manifested the weakness of his gods, that he went again in search of St. Gregory and became a Christian.

- SCHMID et BELET, *Cat. Hist.*, I., 55.

77. *St. Anthony and the Devil.* -

You have doubtless remarked, my young friends, that St. Anthony of Egypt is always represented with devils near him, who are seeking to torment him. That is because this great solitary was really tempted very often, without the devil ever being able to conquer him. He may, indeed, tempt us, and incite us to evil, but he cannot force us; this he once acknowledged to that same St. Anthony. One day when he was in prayer in his monastery, he heard a knocking at the door. He goes to open it, and sees a man of gigantic size. "Who are you?" he asked. "I am Satan," was the reply. "How! and wherefore come you hither?" - "I come to complain to you. Why is it that all solitaries

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and all good Christians misuse me as they do? Why have they nought for me but maledictions?"

"They curse you," the holy anchorite replied, because you do them evil." "I do them no evil; it is themselves who do it; for me, I have no more strength, no more power; there remains to me not a single place where I can rule as a master; everywhere there are Christians, even in deserts and the most frightful solitudes. Let men, therefore, watch well over themselves, and I shall do them no harm; let them, then, cease to curse me."

Thereupon, the devil vanished, and St. Anthony having closed the door of the monastery, hastened to relate to his monks what he had just told him.

- ST ATHANASIUS, *Life of St. Anthony*.

78. *The Demon of Alexandria.* -

Oh! my friends, if you only knew how much the devil covets us, you would be ever on your guard against him. St. Peter aptly describes him as "a roaring lion that goes about seeking whom he may devour." But he pursues with still greater ferocity those who are good and faithful; the others, he is always sure of having. "One day," says the author of the *Fathers of the Desert*, "a holy solitary being in prayer, was transported in spirit to the interior of a monastery where there was more than three hundred monks. He saw there an incredible number of devils following the religious everywhere; to the dormitory, the refectory, the garden, and especially to the chapel. They seemed to be pulling them, pushing them, distracting

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them in every way, in order to lead them to evil. The holy anchorite was then transported to the city of Alexandria; but he was much astonished to see there only one devil, who was sitting over the gate of the city looking as though he had little to do. Surprised at this singularity, he asked himself what it could mean.

"An angel gave him to understand that the devils are very numerous and very busy in monasteries, because the monks resist them all they can; whereas there was only one required for the whole city, because the people of the world are prone enough to evil of themselves. Let this lesson serve for our instruction, dear children; since the devil is ever seeking to tempt us, let us resist him with all our strength."

- RODRIGUEZ, *Christian Perfection*, V., 379.

79. *The Devil at the Death-Bed.* -

It is especially in our last moments, dear friends, that the devil tries to tempt us; but he has fair game with sinners. A rich man named Chrysacrius lived long in a state of scandalous profligacy. "He was," says St. Gregory, "a grovelling soul, whose affections were divided between avarice and debauchery. His excesses wearied Divine justice; he was seized with a malady which insensibly reduced him to the last extremity. But before his soul was separated from his body, - by the just punishment of God, who would punish that sinner even in this world, - his eyes were suddenly opened, and he perceived around his bed a crowd of demons, of hideous and revolting aspect, waiting to drag his soul to hell. Seized with terror at the sight,

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the rich man trembled in every limb, and a cold sweat bedewed his brow; though hardly able to speak, he succeeded, by a violent effort, in calling his son Maximus to his assistance. "Maximus, my son," cried he in his terror, "Maximus, run quick! Remember, my dear Maximus, I have never done *you* any harm - come, then, and protect me!" Maximus, hearing these cries, flies to his father's bedside, and very soon the whole family surround it. In vain do they look on every side: the devils are only visible to the eyes of the dying man. The others were only aware of their presence by the terror of the criminal. Frightened out of his senses, he threw himself on his bed, hoping to escape the sight of that furious crowd. He turned now to the persons present, now to the wall; but everywhere he met those infuriate enemies pursuing him. At last he cried, with all his remaining strength: "A truce! a truce till to-morrow morning!" It was in the midst of these despairing cries that the wretch breathed his last. If only he had called on the name of the Lord with a sincere and repentant heart.

- DEBUSSI, *Month of Mary*, I., p. 218.

80. *Who Created the Devils?* -

If I asked you, my little friends, who created the Angels, you would answer immediately and without hesitation: "God." But if I asked you who created the Devil, what would you answer? I have somewhere read of that question being put to three little boys, very good boys, too. But their replies were very different. They were the sons of M. de Genoude, one of our most celebrated modern writers of the 19th century. Rene answered plainly

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that it was quite impossible that God had created the Devil, because he made nothing but what was good. Guy did not venture to reply, for it seemed to him that the question was put only to give them a lesson. Finally, Henri, the most sedate and rational of the three, answered, after some reflection: "God created him an Angel, but he made himself a devil by his sin." This admirable reply was loudly applauded by all present, and it was generally agreed that the young Henri could not have given a better answer.

- GUILLOIS, *Explication du Catechisme*, I., 127.

VIII. - OF MAN.

81. *Creation of Man.* -

Man is composed of a body and a soul. By his body he differs but little from the animals, but by his soul he resembles God. Do you remember, dear children, how man was created? God had already made, of nothing, the heavens and the earth, as well as the sun and all the other stars; already had He made the terrestrial animals to roam in the fields and woods, the birds to fly in the air, and the fish to sport in the waters. All that was good, but there was wanting a rational creature who could render to God the free and willing homage due to Him. The Lord seemed then to consult with Himself and He said: "Let us make man to our own image and likeness, that he may have dominion over the earth and rule the beasts of the earth, the birds of the air, and the fishes of the sea." He took, then,

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a little clay, formed thereof the body of man, breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and he became a living creature. These last words show that He created a soul to unite to the body. Some time after, God sent on the first man, who was called Adam, a mysterious sleep, during which He took from him one of his ribs, from which He formed the body of the first woman, who was named Eve. To that likewise He united a soul, and gave the woman to Adam for a companion. From these two persons all mankind are descended, and hence it is that we call them our, first parents.

- *Genesis*, I. and II.

82. *The Story of John the Dwarf.* -

Since we are men, we must endure the miseries which are inseparable from our nature, and not do as was done by a solitary, about whom I will tell you a rather amusing story: This was St. John, surnamed the Dwarf, because of his diminutive stature. He inhabited the desert of Scete in Egypt. One day he said to his elder brother: I wish I was like the angels, who live without any trouble, have no need of working, and are incessantly occupied in praising God. Therefor he quits his home, and betakes himself to the dept of a wilderness, where he spent the days and nights in praying or singing the praises of God. At the end of a week, he came back by night and begs knocking at his brother's door. - "Who is there?" "It is I!" - "Who is I?" - "I am John, your brother. Open speedily, for I am dying with hunger." - "Oh! John is no longer a man like others; he is an angel,

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and prays to God all day long; he could not be hungry, for, you know, the angels never eat." - "Pardon me, good brother, I told you that, I know, but I told you wrong; I see now that as long as we are on the earth, we shall be subject to the miseries of humanity."

His brother then rose and let him in, thinking that the lesson might be of profit to him - as it most certainly was.

- PERE MICHEL-ANGE MARIN, *Vie des Peres des deserts*.

83. *The Doctor's Dream.* -

You may, perhaps, never have reflected on one thing, my young friends, namely, that the dreams we have in sleep prove the existence of our soul and its distinctness from our body. St. Augustine himself speaks of this in his letter to Evodius. He relates that one of their friends, named Gennadius, who had practised medicine at

Rome, and came afterwards to settle in Carthage, entertained some doubts concerning the resurrection and eternal life, being unable to understand how that could be. He was wrong to reason so, for if we only believed what we perfectly understood, we should not believe much. Nevertheless, as he was otherwise a good Christian, God was pleased to enlighten him. One night, Gennadius dreamed that a young man of great beauty approached him and said: "Follow me." They set out and soon arrived in a strange city, where they heard music of the most ravishing sweetness. The guide then said to the physician: "This music which you now hear is the singing of the inhabitants of the heavenly Jerusalem." On his waking, Gennadius paid little attention to what he had

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heard; he thought it was only an ordinary dream. The following night, the young man appeared again to him in a dream and asked if he knew him. "Certainly," said Gennadius, "I saw you yesterday, and we journeyed together." The mysterious guide took occasion to give him a lesson on the things wherein he had doubted. He told him: "You spoke, heard, acted during your sleep; your body was in your bed; it was motionless; its eyes were closed; it was not it, therefore, that journeyed, saw, heard. Well! it was your soul that did all that; and, after your death, It will likewise be it that will see, hear, act." Thereupon, Gennadius awoke; he had comprehended, and no longer doubted.

- ST. AUGUSTINE, *Letter to Evodius*. (No 159)

84. *Singular Reasoning on the Soul*. -

In relation to the soul, which is in us, but which we do not see, although we sensibly feel its presence, I have read of a young libertine who was not ashamed to say that he had no more soul than the animals. He was once in a steamboat on the Seine going to Paris. People kept shrugging their shoulders at the absurd and ridiculous things he uttered every moment. But there were three persons there who did not content themselves with laughing in their sleeve. "If we have no soul," said one of them, "we are only lumps of flesh, pretty much the same as my dog, whom you see there gnawing a bone." "If we have no soul," added the boatman, "it must then be said that nothing exists but only what we see." "Precisely so," replied the libertine. "See now if nothing exists that we do not see," cried

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the boatman, much excited by a gale of wind which made his vessel reel at the moment; "now I maintain, good sir, that we have a soul as sure as there is wind," and he gave him a smart rap on the shoulder with his walking stick. "In short," said a third, "the gentleman has proved to us with much *spirit* that he is *only a brute*." This, children, is, undoubtedly, singular reasoning; but no other can be employed with any one who has renounced common sense.

- REYRE, *Anecdotes Chretiennes*.

85. *I will not be a Horse*. -

There can be nothing more absurd than the notions with regard to the soul entertained by nations who have not the happiness of being enlightened by the true faith. The Hindus and Buddhists of 'East India', the Siamese, the Tibetans, and many others imagine that, after a man's death, his soul passes into the body of an animal, and even successively into the bodies of several different animals. A missionary relates on this subject a somewhat droll affair of which he was himself a witness: "Amongst the persons whom I baptized this year," said he, "there was an old man of seventy. He was poor, having no other means of living than the trifling pension which he annually received from the Emperor of China. The bonzes or priests of the country had put it into his head that after his death his soul would pass into the body of a horse which should be destined to carry the Emperor's dispatches. 'Ah! but,' added these impostors, 'see that you don't, when you come to be a horse, turn restive and throw

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your rider; take good care that you don't either stumble, or kick, or bite any one; if you do the gods will punish you.' They had got his imagination so stuffed full of these foolish notions that at times the poor man actually fancied himself a horse already; then he would go down on all-fours, jump, prance and neigh to the

great amusement of every one that chanced to witness this strange sight. Thus it was with him when he came to hear of our holy religion; he was made to understand that, amongst us, one is not exposed to become a horse, or an other animal whatsoever, because that after our death the soul goes straight to God, to be judged and rewarded or punished according to its works. This so rational doctrine pleased him, he sought and obtained instruction, demanded baptism, and died some days after in great sentiments of piety."

- NOEL *Catechisme de Rodez*, VI., 221.

86. *My horse and My Soul.* -

A preacher who was giving a mission in a considerable village, put up at the house of the lord of the manor. Seeing a groom one day rubbing down his master's horse with great care, he amused himself and passed the time of day chatting with him a little "My friend," said he, "how many times a day do you see to your horse, to keep him in such good condition?" "I don't know exactly, Reverend Father but I spend as much as two hours on him every day." "That is a great deal, my child, and I see, accordingly, that your horse is superb. But, tell me, how much time do you give every day to the care of your

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soul? to purify it, to sanctify it, to render it better, in a word, to work out your salvation?" "I will soon tell you that, Reverend Father: Every morning I make the sign of the Cross, I say an 'Our Father,' sometimes a 'Hail Mary'; on Sunday I don't often miss Mass, but I'm best pleased when it's a short one. That's all." "Ah! my poor friend, since you take so little care of your soul, and so much of your master's horse, I would rather be your horse than your soul. And yet, what will it profit you to earn a thousand francs a year, if you come to lose your soul for all eternity?" I know not, my young friends, what the honest groom said or did on hearing that, but, I am sure, if he had common sense, he would have acknowledged his fault, and tried to amend his ways.

And let ourselves profit by this lesson, and beware of giving more care to our body than to our soul.

- NOEL, *Cat. de Rodez*, I., 185.

87. *The Empty Bottle.* -

It is wrong to conclude, children, because we do not see the soul, that there is none in us. Let me tell you, in this connection, a droll adventure that happened to a young man unhappily imbued with bad principles. He had commenced teaching school in order to earn a living; you may guess what kind of religious education he was likely to give his pupils. Being invited once to dinner, towards the end of the repast, he takes in his hand a glass of wine and cries with enthusiasm: "Let us eat, drink, and be merry while we live, for when we are dead all is over." "Yes," said the host

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"it will be all over with your body, but what of your soul, my dear sir?" "My soul! and pray what is a soul? have you seen one? as for me, I only believe in what I have seen." "In that case, my good sir there are many things in which you do not believe. Now it seems to me that there are many beings in existence which we never see. Hold! you who are so learned, tell me what is in that?" And so saying, the gentleman held out to him a white glass bottle closely corked. Our young coxcomb takes the bottle, turns it round and round, looks through it, puts it to his nose, and says at last: "It smells of brandy, and yet I see nothing inside." "I assure you, sir, you are mistaken, for my bottle is full of something that you do not see." At the same time, uncorking the bottle, the host plunges it into a pitcher of water, and from it came forth large bubbles, which burst at the surface, according as the bottle fills. "What is that, sir? he asked of the teacher. "By my word, I believe it is only air, after all!" "Ah! it is air, is it? and the bottle was full of it just now? why then did you not see it? You see there are in the world many things that exist which we cannot see. It follows, therefore, that the soul may exist without our seeing it." The schoolmaster, confused and ashamed, took his hat and his umbrella and made his exit. Two hours after he thought it proper to leave a village where people believed that they had a soul.

- NOEL, *Cat. de Rodez*, I. 184