

ARTICLE IV.

THE GENESIS OF THE OXFORD MOVEMENT
OF 1833.

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THERE is a circular, as well as onward, movement of thought that carries with it every sort of floodwood. The new is ever closely akin to the old. "Robert Elsmere," apparently regarded by the average popular mind as representative of the most advanced thought, sets forth a kind of mental experiences more in vogue half a century ago than at present. Thomas H. Green, an Oxford tutor who was thrown by a reaction from the Anglo-Catholic movement of 1833 into open revolt against all current forms of faith, has been ingeniously identified by Professor McCosh with "Mr. Grey" of Mrs. Ward's novel, while the positions of the book regarding miracles and biblical criticism generally have far more of the tone of the Tübingen school of the first decades of the century than of later theories.

Let us avail ourselves of this passing popular interest, to recall some of the phases of that remarkable movement of thought centring at Oxford University, which, with much of a local and temporary nature, embodies many elements of perennial value to the philosophic student. All such theological agitations as that which took its name from the "Oxford Tracts" issued in the years from 1833 to 1841 have their larger bearing and relation to more general movements of the age, and gain increased interest as reflections of principles at work in other departments

of thought. It will prove fruitful, before proceeding to examine the nature of the Oxford movement itself, to trace the lines of preparation for it in the political, literary, and theological agitations that immediately preceded it and gave it impetus and direction.

The effects of the French Revolution, in many respects the greatest upheaval of modern thought, have been factors in the history of every great movement since.

In politics, its influence was of course for a long time, after the first outburst of hope and enthusiasm had died out in a wail of agony and carnival of blood, met in England by an overwhelming reaction, and the Tory party was able for a considerable period to stifle all call for reform. But in 1830 the cause of liberty in France seemed to burst anew into full blossom, and the Bourbons were again expelled, this time without the loss of a drop of blood. Forgetful of the past, the effect upon all Europe was magical: the oppressed of every nation took courage, and all the crowned heads of the Continent were thrown into alarm. In England the cry of reform, silenced again and again, could now be repressed no longer. Says Mackenzie in his "History of the Nineteenth Century:" "The need, in truth, was very urgent. Two-thirds of the House of Commons were appointed by peers or other influential persons. Old Sarum had two members and not a solitary inhabitant; Gotton two, and seven electors. Three hundred members were returned by one hundred and sixty persons." After Waterloo in 1815, the popular distress and poverty following many years of wasteful and extravagant war brought matters to a crisis. A failure of the harvest in 1816 raised the price of wheat to one hundred and six shillings the quarter. Low wages, scarcity of employment, general depression of business, all seemed to forebode a national disaster of the direst character. Robberies, incendiary fires, instances of mob violence, were of daily occurrence. The strictest repressive measures were not omitted by the Tories in power. The right of

popular assembly was curtailed, newspapers were fettered, the use of military weapons forbidden. The extreme methods of popular coercion managed to hold at bay the masses for some years. But with the first announcement of republicanism in France the day of the Tories was found to be over. Wellington and his colleagues were compelled to resign, and Earl Grey and the Whigs came to power; and by dint of terrorizing the House of Lords into a sullen submission the first Reform Bill of 1832 was passed, enfranchising only a comparatively small number of citizens, but appearing in those times nothing short of a revolution. In the meantime, while the reform legislation was pending, a bill to remove civil disabilities from Roman Catholics was introduced and became a law in 1829. This with other changes involved a curtailment of the power of the Established Church, and, particularly in Ireland, being attended with some tumult and popular excesses, excited the greatest horror in conservative minds lest the Anglican Church was finally doomed. Oxford has been for centuries the centre of high Tory as well as High Church influence. All the weight of the University was, naturally, cast into the scale against the new measures. The odium it thus incurred among the masses was very bitter; riots were threatened in the streets of the city of Oxford; and threats were openly made to destroy the college buildings and to extirpate the University altogether.

In these exciting circumstances the condition of feeling among the professors, fellows, and undergraduates can be imagined. Whatever sympathy had been felt with the general spirit of liberalism of the time was soon lost in the new tide of reaction. It would seem a time for a new band of Cavaliers, had there only been a King Charles round whom to rally. The theological aspect of these events will be evident. Here was now a peculiar situation for the national church. The government, avowedly the guardian and protector of the church and curator of

all her ecclesiastical interests, was now in the hands of the Whigs seemingly acting with her enemies, bent on bestowing upon other religious bodies some measure of equal rights with herself. It was but natural that the churchman of the old High Church school should be led to inquire, Was, after all, such an arrangement of church and state a matter of special divine appointment? Was the wisdom of such a system infallible? Was the Church of England the truest type of the church universal? Was her claim to be a holy catholic church based upon this political alliance with a state that seemed to be tottering to its fall? Vague impressions of this character, if not distinctly avowed, it is safe to assume must have been among the forces that impelled the Oxford Tractarians; and the political situation is largely the key to the theological movement.

Then, it must also be remembered, that the period was one of the greatest literary activity. It was almost a renaissance for poetry and prose. A new school had broken through the old barriers and formal modes of poetic expression, had chosen entirely new fields for the imagination, and had thus given the grandest inspiration to every department of intellectual life. The simple peasant songs of Burns, the homelike pictures of Cowper, brought the poet's attention from distant times and artificial manners to the wealth of interest and beauty that lay at his very feet. The unheralded issue in humble form of the "Lyrical Ballads" of Wordsworth and Coleridge has proved the ushering in of one of the grandest eras of the history of the human mind. Nature with her tranquil secret, simple hearts with the spirit of home affection, the pure contemplation of quiet souls,—these were found to be at least as fruitful and unfailing sources of comfort and moral strength as the old tales of chivalry and mythology, or the artificial fashions of a false society. The "Wizard of the North" had opened to men anew the glory of the mediæval world, and dazzled the vision with pictures of

romance, all the more inspiring because emancipated from the sordid and artificial, and brought into the new atmosphere of the nineteenth century. Byron, and afterward Carlyle, with less of self-unconsciousness and a certain unhealthful tone, disloyal to simple life, yet used all their power to disturb men in their worship of the conventional and established order of things.

Who could fail to breathe such an atmosphere of stirring and quickening literary aspiration at one of the great universities, not the less affected by the new ideas, even if trained in a contrary school, and never really assenting to the new views? Oxford, no less than Cambridge, was all aglow with youthful ardor, and there was such a germinal condition as gave impulse and seminal force to many of the leaders of later decades. Several of the colleges at Oxford, at that time more than at any period since, enjoyed a sort of communism, or at least a family mode of living, for fellows and undergraduates, that allowed the freest play of one mind upon another: and how could thus the common room of Oriel, for example, in spite of all traditions, be other than the hotbed of new ideas? Keble's "Christian Year" had come out in 1827 and was calculated to have great influence in preparing the way for a wide-spread movement of thought in religious circles. Blending the simplicity of style and love of nature, the meditative tone of the new Romantic School of poetry, with traditional beliefs in theology portraying the symbolism of nature and what Newman called, "the sacramental view of the physical world," he thus, no doubt, furnished much material, subsequently used to nurture the sentimental side of the Oxford movement, but which, for the time, simply served to awaken the imagination and arouse the thinking powers. He would find access to a class of minds who regarded the school of Wordsworth and Coleridge with undisguised horror, but would complacently assent in this way to what these poets really taught.

At Cambridge a band of young men were joined in generous emulation of the new ideas, and came to be known as the "Cambridge Apostles of 1830." Of these Coleridge was the real though unacknowledged leader, combining the then recent philosophy of Schelling and Fichte with the teachings of the New Testament. John Sterling, Julius Hare, Arthur Hallam, Tennyson, Trench, and greatest perhaps as a theologian, Maurice, and other names give perennial interest to the circle of the new lights who, if they were "Apostles of Nobody" as they were called, were yet the men of the future, leaders of the thought of the coming generation.¹

When we turn to the distinctly religious and theological world at this time, we must recall that it was a period of introduction of German literature and philosophy to English minds. Coleridge on the one hand, and Carlyle on the other, were busy presenting the great figures of German letters to their countrymen. German rationalism, strictly speaking, had had its day, and what reached England at this epoch was but an after-swell of that tidal wave. Semler, Eichhorn, and Paulus alike were now to be left behind and superseded by the more spiritual philosophy and criticism of Schleiermacher. But at this time the effect of importations from Germany was a mingled impression of divergent critical methods, all alike, however, tending to destroy ideas of authority and throw the mind back upon individualism. All the Oxford Tractarians show the influence of German rationalism, not so much of a special theory, as of general distrust in the letter of Scripture.

In the years just preceding the breaking out of the Anglo-Catholic movement, the leaders of thought at Oxford were Whately, Copleston, Hampden, and Hawkins, and with these Arnold of Rugby. Whately was a man of somewhat dry and unimaginative mind, unable to be-

¹ Littell's Living Age, Feb. 16, 1889, art. "The Cambridge Apostles of 1830."

come founder of a new school of faith; but was yet possessed of a marvellously clear and incisive style and a splendid dialectic faculty. His is what is called the method of "common sense in religion." Marked by little personal magnetism, his leadership was brief. Copleston and Hawkins, both in turn masters of Oriel College, are to us but names, but were men of influence in forming currents of thought in liberal directions. Hampden was the victim in 1836 of persecution by the rising party of the Tractarians. These and a number of lesser lights formed what have been called the "noetics," men who search within the soul alone for the true interpretation of the faith. Thomas Arnold, Master of Rugby, was intimately associated with them, a man of electrical and commanding power with the younger minds of his generation, distinguished as a forerunner of the modern "grammatico-historical" method of biblical interpretation. Such, then, is, in brief, the situation among Oxford men when John Henry Newman becomes a distinguished figure and, after some years of residence and work as tutor, formally opens the Tractarian movement in September, 1833.²

To resume: A reaction from the political reforms is strongly setting in at Oxford; the new Romantic literary awakening is stirring all receptive minds; German authors and critics are being translated and anglicised; Cambridge aspires to be the patron of the new age; the Oxford of Whately and Arnold is largely in sympathy, but the traditions of the past are there too powerful, and it only needs a few men of fit gifts and dynamic quality to inaugurate a tremendous reactionary current, and as it were meet reformation by a kind of counter-reformation. Those men are Newman, Keble, and Pusey, and their associates.

It will be of value to tarry for a brief sketch of these leaders, before we proceed to examine in detail the spec-

² Tulloch, *Movements of Religious Thought in Britain during the Nineteenth Century*, p. 86. sq.

ial work in which they had part.

John Keble, of whose book "The Christian Year" we have spoken, was a man of an earnest, almost pietistic cast, one who would have been a Methodist with the Wesleys, and so was fitted for the Anglo-Catholic movement, which had much of the same spirit. His mind was not broad nor far-seeing. Though of a sweet and loving temperament, his ideas of toleration were wholly undeveloped; to him there could be but one church, that is, the Church of England. He could keep no company with heretics. But his heart was guileless and his faith simple, and thus a saintliness attached itself almost to the rustle of his garments in the eyes of the Oxford students. His book was a kind of rosary, and whatever he might say was received with a certain heavenly authority. He left the university in 1823, but was elected professor of poetry in 1831, delivering his lectures, according to custom, in Latin. In 1833, on the 14th of July, he delivered a sermon from the university pulpit, with the title "National Apostasy," in protest against the Reform Act, and the treatment of the Established Church by the Liberals. Newman counts this the real opening of the religious movement, the issue of the "Tracts for the Times" beginning a few weeks later. Of these, in the eight years of their publication, Keble was author of only four. To neither his sermons nor tracts can much weight be attached, save that, as an object of almost idolatrous reverence among the younger school at Oxford, his words had peculiar influence. His preaching is said to have been entirely without oratorical quality.

Edward Pusey was elected fellow of Oriel in 1824, and professor of Hebrew at Christ Church in 1828, which position he held for the remainder of his life, dying in 1882, aged 82. He published in 1828 a treatise on German rationalism, defending it in a mild way from an attack of Rose, one of the new High Church party. This work shows a spirit of indecision as to the Scripture evidences,

and that want of perfect confidence in the power of biblical truth to commend itself to men without the aid of external authority, which is characteristic of the Anglo-Catholic school. He did not join the Oxford movement until it was well under way (besides a previous one on "Fasting," in 1836, contributing his celebrated tract on "Baptism"). He seems largely wanting in the qualities of a natural leader of men. We are told that he had few intimate friends, and mingled little with society; that he was a bitter controversialist, but of blameless life and munificent charity. That such a man should finally centre the movement in himself, and give to the whole ritualistic party that succeeded it the name of "Puseyites," is a curious phenomenon which we will notice later.

Hurrell Froude, brother of the historian, should also be mentioned as of the original Oxford *coterie*, possessed of brilliant powers, but without mental ballast, a violent Tory and partisan, at one time almost ready to unite with the Romish Church, before the movement in this direction was at all developed. Owing to his early death, he is noticeable only as for a time the constant companion of Newman, and undoubtedly a stimulator of his intellectual and religious life in the direction it afterward took.

But, head and shoulders above all his associates,—one might almost say above all his contemporaries,—both in intellectual gifts and influence, towered the mighty personality of John Henry Newman. Born, with the century, of the family of a London banker, with Huguenot blood in his veins, he early became subject to religious influence, experienced conversion, and embraced evangelical and Calvinistic views. Graduating from Trinity College, Oxford, at twenty-one, he was chosen fellow of Oriel, and joined the band of liberal thinkers there, and was for a time a disciple of Whately. The prevalent rationalistic tendencies affected his mind to a considerable degree, and he afterward describes himself as leaning to intellectualism, and even as "drifting in the direction of liberalism."

However, illness, bereavement, the influence of Keble and his "Christian Year," the acquaintance of Hurrell Froude, and finally reaction against the spirit of current events, in a few years produced a complete revulsion of mind, and impelled him through the whole arc of thought from evangelicalism, through liberalism, to High-Churchism, and so at last to Romanism. Such a transition is, in kind, not only natural, but for a certain order of mind almost inevitable in such circumstances. The evangelical scheme assumes the right of free judgment in the individual. The mind becoming possibly flavored with a certain intellectual pride, may perhaps forget to listen to the low voices of consciousness, and follow the clamors of mere reason in her lighter and shallower moods. Then, of a sudden,, alarmed at the outcome of rationalistic assumptions, distrusting the intellect entirely because of the danger of its misuse, unable to shake off the previously begotten doubts of the inspiration of the Scriptures, unwilling to trust the truth to reveal itself,—the inevitable resource of timid minds is refuge in the theory of some external authority. Newman openly admitted that Hume's reasoning about miracles was unanswerable. His sermons imply again and again the impotence of man to solve his own doubts. His teaching was calculated to unhinge the young minds under his influence, and fill them with seeds of scepticism. But while he himself, through the force of a devout and reverent spirit, could find no rest until he had supplied new foundations for his tottering faith, he would be unable to restrain and lead back to the fold of the church those whom he had once unsettled. J. A. Froude the historian frankly avows that the first beginning of his free-thinking was inspired by Newman. Probably no man in his time was able to make as many perverts to various phases of doubt as this most devoted and religious of men. He occupied for many years the pulpit of St. Mary's Church at Oxford in addition to his work as teacher, and there his personality was

felt to the highest degree. His wonderful voice, his style of marvellous clearness and melody, his unequalled powers of logic, combined with all the gifts of imagination and the unutterable sweetness of tender emotionalism, moved his hearers to their deepest souls. Of a mental tenacity and a commanding, military bearing which Froude has compared to Julius Cæsar's, as he has also compared his clear-cut features and look of conscious power to those of the same world leader,—yet of a caressing and pleading nature, as of one who lived only for love,—no man of our age, it is safe to say, has so won the loyalty and almost worship of all classes of his compeers, and made himself so large a factor in the lives of the greatest men of his century, as the great pervert to Rome. As to his face, I cannot forbear quoting a few sentences from R. H. Hutton: "Most of us know by bust, photograph, or picture the wonderful face of the great Cardinal: that wide forehead ploughed deep with parallel, horizontal furrows, which seem to express his careworn grasp of the double aspect of human nature, its aspect in the intellectual and its aspect in the spiritual world, the pale cheek down which—

‘long lines of shadow slope,

Which years and curious thought and suffering give.’

the pathetic eye which speaks compassion from afar, and yet gazes wondering into the impassable gulf which separates man from man, and the strange mixture of asceticism and tenderness in all the lines of that mobile and reticent mouth where humor, playfulness, and sympathy are intricately blended with those severer moods that ‘refuse and restrain.’ On the whole it is a face, full, in the first place, of spiritual passion of the highest order, and, in the next, of that subtle and intimate knowledge of the details of human limitation and weakness, which makes all spiritual passion look utterly ambitious and hopeless, unless, indeed, it be guided among the stakes and dikes and pitfalls of the human battle-field by the direct provi-

dence of God."² Of Newman's accomplishments, of his rare powers in music, in poetry, and other lines we cannot here speak. On the whole, we may repeat that, of all the men of the century, no other such born leader of men can be placed beside him who was found ready, with mistaken devotion, to sacrifice his following, and even his intellect itself, at the shrine of a relic of a by-gone age.

But to hasten on. In the years before 1833 Newman was writing his "Arian Controversy," which helped to bring his mind to a crisis. In the early part of the eventful year, himself and Froude, in the midst of much mental agitation, made a voyage through the Mediterranean Sea, when the beautiful hymn, "Lead, Kindly Light," was written off the Bay of Bonifacio, and may be taken as typical of his sense of need at that time. On his return, England was in a turmoil over the Reform Act, and all things betokened revolutionary changes in the relation of church and state. An appeal was drawn up by Palmer, afterward a prominent Anglo-Catholic, and others at Oxford, circulated among the clergy and presented with 7,000 signatures to the Archbishop of Canterbury. An address was made to the king, expressing anxiety regarding the church, and various other projects were set on foot to rouse the spirit of the Anglican clergy. This early movement was mostly independent of Newman, who, on his own responsibility, determined to issue a series of tracts from Oxford, to be privately distributed, if necessary, among the ministry, entitled "Tracts for the Times." The first appeared in September, 1833.

Different statements regarding their origin have been made: that they were suggested by the sermon of Keble's in July; that a conference held in Hadleigh was the starting point; that a pamphlet called the "Churchman's Manual" was really the first tract; and some refer back to a book by Percival, called "The Christian Peace Offering of 1828," as the beginning of the movement. But New-

² Modern Guides of English Thought in Matters of Faith, p. 53.

man claimed the step of issuing the tracts as entirely his own, and certainly the quality and spirit are all his own, as was the main share of the work.

Ninety in all were issued from Sept. 9, 1833, to 1841, when they were finally brought to an end. But seventy of the number came out the first two years. The greatest portion were written by Newman himself, several by Pusey, four by Keble, and a considerable number by various authors. They were not revised or edited at all, at least at first, and differed widely among themselves, both in quality and opinions. Some were original essays, or treatises; others, extracts from earlier writers. It was impossible that such a series, however favorably received at first, should fail to excite opposition in many quarters. The Evangelicals, the Liberals, the old High Church party itself, could not fail to be aroused in turn to hostility by such a wholesale attempt to rehabilitate the spirit of the past as this proved to be. Along with the "Tracts" proper, series of the writings of the ancient Fathers, lives of the saints, ancient breviaries, rubrics, missals, etc., were all searched out and brought to light with indescribable devotion to whatever was sufficiently old. Mediævalism became the order of the day. Ancient art and symbolism, revivals and restorations of the antique in church architecture and decoration, in priestly vestments and altar furnishings, rites and ceremonies of every kind, were all part of one common plan. Pusey's "Library of the Fathers," without any real editing or classification, containing every sort of theological and ecclesiastical rubbish, was offered to the public, hoping that the maxim, "*quod ubique ab omnibus*," etc., would somehow find standing-ground for the Church of England.

In essence, the theology of the Tractarians, so far as it can be grouped together, was the outcome of an attempt to locate catholicity in the Church of England by repudiating the Reformation and the spirit of Protestantism, and embracing whatever could show continuous development

from ancient times. The English Church was to be traced not to the Reformation, but to missionaries of the first and second centuries. All her ecclesiastical life was to be credited with an independent vitality, not essentially affected by Romanism at any point in her history.

Certain great points of doctrine were to be insisted upon as marks of catholicity. After antiquity and unity come the doctrines of apostolical succession, baptismal regeneration, the sacrifice of the Eucharist or the Mass, and the authority of creeds and councils.

Apostolical succession requires that there should be an unbroken line of episcopal consecration from the apostles down to the present; a position immensely difficult to sustain by tracing a chain, link by link, through all the vicissitudes of the history of the church in the dark ages or even in the Reformation era. Macaulay in one of his essays gives a trenchant characterization of this theory, from which we select a single sentence: "And whether any clergyman be a priest by succession from the apostles depends upon the question, whether, during that long period, some thousands of events took place, any one of which may, without any gross improbability, be supposed not to have taken place."⁴

Baptismal regeneration depends upon the apostolic authority derived from this succession of the ordaining bishop; the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, upon the same precarious and unprovable theory.

Now, if these, together with the authority of creeds and councils, indicate the true church, surely the claim of the English Church is far more insecure than that of either the Greek or Roman Church. If she is catholic, they are far more so; for they have more consistently developed on the lines indicated, and have taught these tenets more distinctly and continuously.

If the authority of councils be admitted, how will it be

⁴ "Gladstone on Church and State," Macaulay's *Essays*, Riverside Ed., Vol. iv. p. 168.

sufficiently shown that the Council of Trent was schismatic and not catholic? Is not he a true catholic who embraces the doctrines of that council, and accepts the dogma of immaculate conception, or even that of the infallibility of the Pope? Certain principles of catholicity once admitted, inexorable logic leads, not to Anglicanism, but to Rome.

Newman, one of the rarest logicians of the age, called by a noted writer "the John Stuart Mill of theology," could not fail to be finally impelled, in spite of all early prejudices, to the inevitable conclusions whither his premises tended. That he was ignorant for years of the destination to which he was being carried, cannot be doubted, nor that he was entirely free from that desire to take proselytes with him to the Romish Communion which Kingsley and others charged upon him.

In 1841 appeared Tract No. 90, in which Newman made a final effort to hold his standing-ground in the Church of England, by arguing that the Thirty-nine Articles, for example, might be subscribed to and interpreted in an entirely different sense from that intended by their original framers, and that essential Romanism was not inconsistent with articles directly prepared as a breastwork against it. This publication created the greatest excitement, and led to the suppression of the series by order of the Bishop of Oxford.

Silenced as a writer, and afterward as a preacher at Oxford, Newman resigned his living, and withdrew to his retired parish church at Littlemore, where he remained in seclusion until 1846, when he formally seceded and united with the Church of Rome.

This final act, which one would think might have been foreseen for many years, called forth a great outburst of surprise and sorrow from many who had gone with him to the very brink, but could not dare the unknown sea. Not many at first followed him; but gradually more and more of his disciples found their position untenable and

abandoned it to become Romish priests. Faber, the hymn writer, seceded the same year as Newman; Manning, not until 1851. In 1862 three hundred clergymen in all; in the course of twenty years or so later, three thousand clergymen and eminent laymen were counted among the proselytes to Rome. Keble, with his sentimental temperament, on consulting his wife's feelings and testing his own attachment to his parish home, decided that he could never go over to Rome, and many of the other Tractarians showed a like want of logic or honesty. Pusey, prosecuted and silenced in 1843 for two years for teaching transubstantiation, gathered a halo of martyrdom about him, became the only visible head of the disorganized band of Anglo-Catholics, and gave to the after-wave of the whole movement the name of "Puseyism." Gladstone, Samuel Wilberforce, J. B. Mozley, Church, and others, after a little gave new strength to the party, which has enjoyed a series of alternate persecutions and revivals to the present, when we seem again on the rising flood of ritualism both in England and in this country.

The positions of the modern apostles of ritualism differ in no way essentially from the theology of the "Oxford Tracts;" only the approaches to Rome are more carefully guarded and the claim is made, in the words of Dr. Ewer in 1883, that "the Great Revival itself instead of having a drift Romeward, has proved to be a solvent, analyzing Romanism, and separating for condemnation its mediæval and modern popery from ancient catholicity."*

But it is evident that the effect of the movement upon such minds as those of Matthew Arnold, Arthur Hugh Clough, and F. W. Newman is not less legitimate and logical than the secession of John Henry Newman and his followers to the Church of Rome.

The lesson of this whole upheaval of thought, it seems to us, is, that faith in God and the Scriptures is based

* Pamphlet: "What is the Anglican Church?" F. C. Ewer, S. T. D. "Living Church". 1883, p. 31.

upon faith in the capacity of the human soul to apprehend truth, and that to distrust the appeal to the human mind under the guidance of the Holy Spirit reverently sought is inevitably to end either in submission and surrender of the judgment to a so-called infallible church, or in the despair of hopeless doubt.