

EDITORIAL NOTES

‘Yes’ or ‘No.’

A few months ago *The Catholic Times* conceived the happy idea of asking certain persons to tell us about their conversion to the Catholic Faith; and the weekly articles, under the general heading ‘Why I am a Catholic,’ are still attracting the attention that such accounts, with their promise of personal motive and their flavour of intimate autobiography, are always sure to win. More than one person has suggested that another set of articles might be written by another set of writers (and presumably not in *The Catholic Times* or in *BLACKFRIARS*) under the heading ‘Why I am not a Catholic.’ On the principle that ‘the scanning of error is necessary for the confirmation of truth,’ such a series would have its usefulness and yet not be without interest.

This perennial interest in ‘what people believe, and why’ is evidenced in a marked manner in the current number of *The Nation*. *The Nation* for August 21st has expressed a desire to know what are the religious beliefs of its readers. A Questionnaire is presented by way of a Supplement, and there are fourteen questions, which must be answered by a simple ‘Yes’ or ‘No.’ The questions turn upon the existence of God, the immortality of the soul, the divinity of Christ, the inspiration of the Bible, transubstantiation, etc., etc. It seems that this harmless piece of curiosity on the part of the editor of *The Nation* was the result of a correspondence in his paper regarding rationalism and religion. He does not promise that he will adapt his editorial policy to the religious beliefs of his readers when he has discovered what those beliefs are, nor does he pretend to be able to establish belief in the immortality of the soul or the existence of God, as it

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were, by a show of hands. He does not ask **WHY** his readers believe this or that : ' Yes ' or ' No ' is the only answer permissible. This refusal to take motive into account seems to be the weak point about the Questionnaire. If a person may write ' No ' to the question ' Do you believe in a personal God ? ' it seems scarcely fair to him to leave it at that, and not offer him the challenge of a ' Why ? ' If he is sincere, he will have a reason, and he will not be pleased if his replies are treated as irresponsibly as the capricious answers that are given in Birthday Books when a person is asked on what day of the week he was born or what is his favourite colour.

Readers of *The Nation* will feel absolved from responsibility when they are not expected to give reasons and motives, and perhaps some of them will answer irresponsibly in the same way as they would answer a riddle. And of those who read Question 2 : ' Do you believe in an impersonal, purposive and creative power of which living beings are the vehicle, corresponding to the Life Force, the *élan vital*, the Evolutionary Appetite, etc. ? ' I wonder how many will give it up.

The Advancement of Science.

From Wednesday, August 4th, to Wednesday, August 11th, Oxford received a body of scientific people facetiously referred to by the members themselves as the ' British Ass.' The official title of this august gathering runs, ' The British Association for the Advancement of Science.'

One cannot but admire the enthusiasm of these scientists : the vast lists of lectures delivered and attended proved to what lengths sacrifice can go—attendance in a crowded room during Oxford's August is proof enough. Nevertheless, it is impossible not to feel that since the enthusiasm is there, the British Association might profitably devote one annual meet-

ing not so much to the advancement of Science as to the definition of Science. Where everybody has a special vocabulary and nobody (except the reporter) draws any definite conclusions, the advancement of science seems to be more through the air—the ‘hot air’ of August—than along the forthrights of logic that lead through the maze of the world to the truth at its centre. If the professor whose performing rats opened a box secured with a series of fourteen locks were to come to some definite conclusion in conversation with the learned gentleman who thrilled the ladies with the pronouncement that flowers fall in love, while scientists might shudder at anything so fatal to the advancement of Science, the rat-catcher and the gardener would be as grateful as the Scholastic Philosophers whom Bergson pitied for their inability to rise above common sense. It is confessedly a great strain to feel that on Saturday evening a man draws his chair in comfort to the fire happy in his acceptance of some such theory as the ‘quantum theory,’ but that he may leap out of bed on Monday morning to receive a book branding all who hold such opinions as imbeciles. The advancement of Science is indeed rapid—even in an age of aeroplanes—but it would be a comfort if we were allowed to know, once and for all, whence we came, whither we are going, and, if it is not expecting too much, even where we are. The minds of harmless men are growing to realize that it is more and more impossible to know if it is now or then. Some unscientific person is actually reported to have gone so far as to assert that we have a proof of the wisdom and mercy of the Creator in his allowing us only one second at a time. If we were given more we should never know whether it was now or then. But now (or then) that last stronghold seems to be falling, and anything may happen. All this makes the person, unable to keep pace with the advancement of Science,

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thankful that it is still possible to disagree with a certain famous Dean, who told some of the members of the British Association that Science is for us, in the twentieth century, the chief vehicle of revelation. Of such is the revelation that a man, by writing down his past and probing farther and farther back, may eventually be able to remember things he did before he could speak and, who knows? perhaps even before that. This is a distinct advance. Another revelation, that was intended to bring nearer the day when heaven and earth are to lay down their veil, and that Apocalypse is to turn us pale, told us that in selecting a man for a job the best way to find out if he can do it is to set him to do it. And still nobody even smiled.

Disrespect for the British Association is far from our minds, but must we accept with solemn seriousness the statement that 'there was a time when hairy man was a positive danger to himself,' or that 'hairlessness, accidentally or artificially acquired, became the outward and visible sign of a certain standard of intellectual development'? May we plead 'not guilty' of irreverence even if we cannot help smiling when we read that there was first, '*homo ignifer*, depending on natural sources for his fire and chance of cooked food; he played with fire, singed himself and burned his hairy contemporaries'?

It would be easier to treat the British Association seriously if so many frivolities were not put forward in its name.