

Science Doubted

March 6, 2021

Few people today still call in question the priority of science when it comes to providing us men with a happy world and the good life. Replace religion with science and materialism, said the *Protocols of the Sages of Sion* (EC 699), as though science and materialism solve all problems of life. The famous Greek philosopher Aristotle (384–322 B.C.) needed four causes to analyse reality: purpose, maker, form and material, but modern man has effectively rubbed out the final cause or purpose and the efficient cause or maker, no doubt because both of these lead in reality to God, who is not thus needed for a thing's intrinsic form or matter. And from Galileo (1564–1642) onwards, “science” has been more and more godless.

However, the wisdom of Shakespeare (1564–1616) recognised that there was more in Heaven and earth than there was in Horatio's philosophy (*Hamlet I*), and Germany's greatest writer, Goethe (1749–1832), knew that there was a superior knowledge of Nature to that of science, a knowledge which seized Nature's inner spirit. Another contemporary, the English poet William Wordsworth (1770–1850), was also aware at the turn from the 18th to the 19th centuries that mankind was taking with the industrial revolution and the promotion of the physical sciences, a direction which in some respects was not progressing but regressing: as the mastery of matter was advancing, so the mastery of spirit was receding. One of Wordsworth's disciples was the famous Catholic convert and writer of popular spiritual books, Fr. William Faber (1814–1863). Wordsworth never converted himself, but he bore Catholic fruit. Here is a famous sonnet of his on the anti-spiritual modern world:–

The world is too much with us; late and soon,

Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers; Modern shopping!

Little we see in Nature that is ours; What do suburbanites know of Nature?

We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!

This Sea that bares her bosom to the moon; Wordsworth himself spent a very happy

The winds that will be howling at all hours, childhood amid the delights of Nature in

And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers; the Lake District in North England.

For this, for everything, we are out of tune;

It moves us not. Great God! I'd rather be He cries out that he would rather be a

A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn; pre-Christian than a post-Christian, for at

So might I, standing on this pleasant lea, least his belief in pagan gods would give

Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn; him some sense of union with the glorious

Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea; spectacle of Nature in front of him.

Or hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn. As it is, he feels only "forlorn" – burnt out.

As a rule, suburbanites do not like poetry and their vile media will write it out like prose if they can. To say what they have to say, poets as such take the extra trouble to say it with rhyme and rhythm, and that mere fact is enough to

suggest that there is more to life than just materialistic suburbs. But most suburbanites are content with their materialism and prefer not to be reminded of its deficiency. And so love of Nature turns into skiing and speedboats, while poetry is discredited, discounted, waiting to be revived by a revaluing of things spiritual. That will come, but it depends on the Catholic Church. Man is enough to pull Nature and himself down, but only God can lift either of them back up. Fr. Faber showed the way. He at least did not end up forlorn.

Kyrie eleison.