

**Blaise Pascal**



*Lettres  
Provinciales*

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# LETTER I

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Paris, January 23, 1656

SIR,

We were entirely mistaken. It was only yesterday that I was undeceived. Until that time I had laboured under the impression that the disputes in the Sorbonne were vastly important, and deeply affected the interests of religion. The frequent convocations of an assembly so illustrious as that of the Theological Faculty of Paris, attended by so many extraordinary and unprecedented circumstances, led one to form such high expectations that it was impossible to help coming to the conclusion that the subject was most extraordinary. You will be greatly surprised, however, when you learn from the following account the issue of this grand demonstration, which, having made myself perfectly master of the subject, I shall be able to tell you in very few words.

Two questions, then, were brought under examination; the one a question of fact, the other a question of right.

The question of fact consisted in ascertaining whether M. Arnauld was guilty of presumption, for having asserted in his second letter that he had carefully perused the book of Jansenius, and that he had not discovered the propositions condemned by the late pope; but that, nevertheless, as he condemned these propositions wherever they might occur, he condemned them in Jansenius, if they were really contained in that work.

The question here was, if he could, without presumption, entertain a doubt that these propositions were in Jansenius,

after the bishops had declared that they were.

The matter having been brought before the Sorbonne, seventy-one doctors undertook his defence, maintaining that the only reply he could possibly give to the demands made upon him in so many publications, calling on him to say if he held that these propositions were in that book, was that he had not been able to find them, but that if they were in the book, he condemned them in the book.

Some even went a step farther and protested that, after all the search they had made into the book, they had never stumbled upon these propositions, and that they had, on the contrary, found sentiments entirely at variance with them. They then earnestly begged that, if any doctor present had discovered them, he would have the goodness to point them out; adding that what was so easy could not reasonably be refused, as this would be the surest way to silence the whole of them, M. Arnauld included; but this proposal has been uniformly declined. So much for the one side.

On the other side are eighty secular doctors and some forty mendicant friars, who have condemned M. Arnauld's proposition, without choosing to examine whether he has spoken truly or falsely- who, in fact, have declared that they have nothing to do with the veracity of his proposition, but simply with its temerity.

Besides these, there were fifteen who were not in favor of the censure, and who are called Neutrals.

Such was the issue of the question of fact, regarding which, I must say, I give myself very little concern. It does not affect my conscience in the least whether M. Arnauld is presumptuous or the reverse; and should I be tempted, from

curiosity, to ascertain whether these propositions are contained in Jansenius, his book is neither so very rare nor so very large as to hinder me from reading it over from beginning to end, for my own satisfaction, without consulting the Sorbonne on the matter.

Were it not, however, for the dread of being presumptuous myself, I really think that I would be disposed to adopt the opinion which has been formed by the most of my acquaintances, who, though they have believed hitherto on common report that the propositions were in Jansenius, begin now to suspect the contrary, owing to this strange refusal to point them out- a refusal the more extraordinary to me as I have not yet met with a single individual who can say that he has discovered them in that work. I am afraid, therefore, that this censure will do more harm than good, and that the impression which it will leave on the minds of all who know its history will be just the reverse of the conclusion that has been come to. The truth is the world has become sceptical of late and will not believe things till it sees them. But, as I said before, this point is of very little moment, as it has no concern with religion.

The question of right, from its affecting the faith, appears much more important, and, accordingly, I took particular pains in examining it. You will be relieved, however, to find that it is of as little consequence as the former.

The point of dispute here was an assertion of M. Arnauld's in the same letter, to the effect "that the grace, without which we can do nothing, was wanting to St. Peter at his fall." You and I supposed that the controversy here would turn upon the great principles of grace; such as

whether grace is given to all men? Or if it is efficacious of itself? But we were quite mistaken. You must know I have become a great theologian within this short time; and now for the proofs of it!

To ascertain the matter with certainty, I repaired to my neighbor, M. N-, doctor of Navarre, who, as you are aware, is one of the keenest opponents of the Jansenists, and, my curiosity having made me almost as keen as himself, I asked him if they would not formally decide at once that "grace is given to all men," and thus set the question at rest. But he gave me a sore rebuff and told me that that was not the point; that there were some of his party who held that grace was not given to all; that the examiners themselves had declared, in a full assembly of the Sorbonne, that that opinion was problematical; and that he himself held the same sentiment, which he confirmed by quoting to me what he called that celebrated passage of St. Augustine: "We know that grace is not given to all men."

I apologized for having misapprehended his sentiment and requested him to say if they would not at least condemn that other opinion of the Jansenists which is making so much noise: "That grace is efficacious of itself, and invincibly determines our will to what is good." But in this second query I was equally unfortunate. "You know nothing about the matter," he said; "that is not a heresy- it is an orthodox opinion; all the Thomists maintain it; and I myself have defended it in my Sorbonic thesis."

I did not venture again to propose my doubts, and yet I was as far as ever from understanding where the difficulty lay; so, at last, in order to get at it, I begged him to tell me

where, then, lay the heresy of M. Arnauld's proposition. "It lies here," said he, "that he does not acknowledge that the righteous have the power of obeying the commandments of God, in the manner in which we understand it."

On receiving this piece of information, I took my leave of him; and, quite proud at having discovered the knot of the question, I sought M. N-, who is gradually getting better and was sufficiently recovered to conduct me to the house of his brother-in-law, who is a Jansenist, if ever there was one, but a very good man notwithstanding. Thinking to insure myself a better reception, I pretended to be very high on what I took to be his side, and said: "Is it possible that the Sorbonne has introduced into the Church such an error as this, 'that all the righteous have always the power of obeying the commandments of God?'"

"What say you?" replied the doctor. "Call you that an error- a sentiment so Catholic that none but Lutherans and Calvinists impugn it?"

"Indeed!" said I, surprised in my turn; "so you are not of their opinion?"

"No," he replied; "we anathematize it as heretical and impious."

Confounded by this reply, I soon discovered that I had overacted the Jansenist, as I had formerly overdone the Molinist. But, not being sure if I had rightly understood him, I requested him to tell me frankly if he held "that the righteous have always a real power to observe the divine precepts?" Upon this, the good man got warm (but it was with a holy zeal) and protested that he would not disguise his sentiments on any consideration- that such was, indeed,



his belief, and that he and all his party would defend it to the death, as the pure doctrine of St. Thomas, and of St. Augustine their master.

This was spoken so seriously as to leave me no room for doubt; and under this impression I returned to my first doctor and said to him, with an air of great satisfaction, that I was sure there would be peace in the Sorbonne very soon; that the Jansenists were quite at one with them in reference to the power of the righteous to obey the commandments of God; that I could pledge my word for them and could make them seal it with their blood.

"Hold there!" said he. "One must be a theologian to see the point of this question. The difference between us is so subtle that it is with some difficulty we can discern it ourselves- you will find it rather too much for your powers of comprehension. Content yourself, then, with knowing that it is very true the Jansenists will tell you that all the righteous have always the power of obeying the commandments; that is not the point in dispute between us; but mark you, they will not tell you that that power is proximate. That is the point."

This was a new and unknown word to me. Up to this moment I had managed to understand matters, but that term involved me in obscurity; and I verily believe that it has been invented for no other purpose than to mystify. I requested him to give me an explanation of it, but he made a mystery of it, and sent me back, without any further satisfaction, to demand of the Jansenists if they would admit this proximate power. Having charged my memory with the phrase (as to my understanding, that was out of the

question), I hastened with all possible expedition, fearing that I might forget it, to my Jansenist friend and accosted him, immediately after our first salutations, with: "Tell me, pray, if you admit the proximate power?" He smiled, and replied, coldly: "Tell me yourself in what sense you understand it, and I may then inform you what I think of it." As my knowledge did not extend quite so far, I was at a loss what reply to make; and yet, rather than lose the object of my visit, I said at random: "Why, I understand it in the sense of the Molinists." "To which of the Molinists do you refer me?" replied he, with the utmost coolness. I referred him to the whole of them together, as forming one body, and animated by one spirit.

"You know very little about the matter," returned he. "So far are they from being united in sentiment that some of them are diametrically opposed to each other. But, being all united in the design to ruin M. Arnauld, they have resolved to agree on this term proximate, which both parties might use indiscriminately, though they understand it diversely, that thus, by a similarity of language and an apparent conformity, they may form a large body and get up a majority to crush him with the greater certainty."

This reply filled me with amazement; but, without imbibing these impressions of the malicious designs of the Molinists, which I am unwilling to believe on his word, and with which I have no concern, I set myself simply to ascertain the various senses which they give to that mysterious word proximate. "I would enlighten you on the subject with all my heart," he said; "but you would discover in it such a mass of contrariety and contradiction that you

would hardly believe me. You would suspect me. To make sure of the matter, you had better learn it from some of themselves; and I shall give you some of their addresses. You have only to make a separate visit to one called M. le Moine and to Father Nicolai."

"I have no acquaintance with any of these persons," said I.

"Let me see, then," he replied, "if you know any of those whom I shall name to you; they all agree in sentiment with M. le Moine."

I happened, in fact, to know some of them.

"Well, let us see if you are acquainted with any of the Dominicans whom they call the 'New Thomists,' for they are all the same with Father Nicolai."

I knew some of them also whom he named; and, resolved to profit by this council and to investigate the matter, I took my leave of him and went immediately to one of the disciples of M. le Moine. I begged him to inform me what it was to have the proximate power of doing a thing.

"It is easy to tell you that, " he replied; "it is merely to have all that is necessary for doing it in such a manner that nothing is wanting to performance."

"And so," said I, "to have the proximate power of crossing a river, for example, is to have a boat, boatmen, oars, and all the rest, so that nothing is wanting?"

"Exactly so," said the monk.

"And to have the proximate power of seeing," continued I, "must be to have good eyes and the light of day; for a person with good sight in the dark would not have the

proximate power of seeing, according to you, as he would want the light, without which one cannot see?"

"Precisely," said he.

"And consequently," returned I, "when you say that all the righteous have the proximate power of observing the commandments of God, you mean that they have always all the grace necessary for observing them, so that nothing is wanting to them on the part of God."

"Stay there," he replied; "they have always all that is necessary for observing the commandments, or at least for asking it of God."

"I understand you," said I; "they have all that is necessary for praying to God to assist them, without requiring any new grace from God to enable them to pray."

"You have it now," he rejoined.

"But is it not necessary that they have an efficacious grace, in order to pray to God?"

"No," said he; "not according to M. le Moine."

To lose no time, I went to the Jacobins, and requested an interview with some whom I knew to be New Thomists, and I begged them to tell me what proximate power was. "Is it not," said I, "that power to which nothing is wanting in order to act?"

"No," said they.

"Indeed! fathers," said I; "if anything is wanting to that power, do you call it proximate? Would you say, for instance, that a man in the night-time, and without any light, had the proximate power of seeing?"

"Yes, indeed, he would have it, in our opinion, if he is not blind."

"I grant that," said I; "but M. le Moine understands it in a different manner."

"Very true," they replied; "but so it is that we understand it."

"I have no objections to that," I said; "for I never quarrel about a name, provided I am apprised of the sense in which it is understood. But I perceive from this that, when you speak of the righteous having always the proximate power of praying to God, you understand that they require another supply for praying, without which they will never pray."

"Most excellent!" exclaimed the good fathers, embracing me; "exactly the thing; for they must have, besides, an efficacious grace bestowed upon all, and which determines their wills to pray; and it is heresy to deny the necessity of that efficacious grace in order to pray."

"Most excellent!" cried I, in return; "but, according to you, the Jansenists are Catholics, and M. le Moine a heretic; for the Jansenists maintain that, while the righteous have power to pray, they require nevertheless an efficacious grace; and this is what you approve. M. le Moine, again, maintains that the righteous may pray without efficacious grace; and this is what you condemn."

"Ay," said they; "but M. le Moine calls that power 'proximate power.'"

"How now! fathers," I exclaimed; "this is merely playing with words, to say that you are agreed as to the common terms which you employ, while you differ with them as to the sense of these terms."

The fathers made no reply; and at this juncture, who should come in but my old friend, the disciple of M. le

Moine! I regarded this at the time as an extraordinary piece of good fortune; but I have discovered since then that such meetings are not rare- that, in fact, they are constantly mixing in each other's society.

"I know a man," said I, addressing myself to M. le Moine's disciple, "who holds that all the righteous have always the power of praying to God, but that, notwithstanding this, they will never pray without an efficacious grace which determines them, and which God does not always give to all the righteous. Is he a heretic?"

"Stay," said the doctor; "you might take me by surprise. Let us go cautiously to work. Distinguo. If he call that power proximate power, he will be a Thomist, and therefore a Catholic; if not, he will be a Jansenist and, therefore, a heretic."

"He calls it neither proximate nor non-proximate," said I.

"Then he is a heretic," quoth he; "I refer you to these good fathers if he is not."

I did not appeal to them as judges, for they had already nodded assent; but I said to them: "He refuses to admit that word proximate, because he can meet with nobody who will explain it to him."

Upon this one of the fathers was on the point of offering his definition of the term, when he was interrupted by M. le Moine's disciple, who said to him: "Do you mean, then, to renew our broils? Have we not agreed not to explain that word proximate, but to use it on both sides without saying what it signifies?" To this the Jacobin gave his assent.

I was thus let into the whole secret of their plot; and, rising to take my leave of them, I remarked: "Indeed,

fathers, I am much afraid this is nothing better than pure chicanery; and, whatever may be the result of your convocations, I venture to predict that, though the censure should pass, peace will not be established. For though it should be decided that the syllables of that word proximate should be pronounced, who does not see that, the meaning not being explained, each of you will be disposed to claim the victory? The Jacobins will contend that the word is to be understood in their sense; M. le Moine will insist that it must be taken in his; and thus there will be more wrangling about the explanation of the word than about its introduction. For, after all, there would be no great danger in adopting it without any sense, seeing it is through the sense only that it can do any harm. But it would be unworthy of the Sorbonne and of theology to employ equivocal and captious terms without giving any explanation of them. In short, fathers, tell me, I entreat you, for the last time, what is necessary to be believed in order to be a good Catholic?"

"You must say," they all vociferated simultaneously, "that all the righteous have the proximate power, abstracting from it all sense- from the sense of the Thomists and the sense of other divines."

"That is to say," I replied, in taking leave of them, "that I must pronounce that word to avoid being the heretic of a name. For, pray, is this a Scripture word?" "No," said they. "Is it a word of the Fathers, the Councils, or the Popes?" "No." "Is the word, then, used by St. Thomas?" "No." "What necessity, therefore, is there for using it since it has neither the authority of others nor any sense of itself.?" "You are an opinionative fellow," said they; "but you shall say it, or you

shall be a heretic, and M. Arnauld into the bargain; for we are the majority, and, should it be necessary, we can bring a sufficient number of Cordeliers into the field to carry the day."

On hearing this solid argument, I took my leave of them, to write you the foregoing account of my interview, from which you will perceive that the following points remain undisputed and uncondemned by either party. First, That grace is not given to all men. Second, That all the righteous have always the power of obeying the divine commandments. Third, That they require, nevertheless, in order to obey them, and even to pray, an efficacious grace, which invincibly determines their will. Fourth, That this efficacious grace is not always granted to all the righteous, and that it depends on the pure mercy of God. So that, after all, the truth is safe, and nothing runs any risk but that word without the sense, proximate.

Happy the people who are ignorant of its existence! happy those who lived before it was born! for I see no help for it, unless the gentlemen of the Academy, by an act of absolute authority, banish that barbarous term, which causes so many divisions, from beyond the precincts of the Sorbonne. Unless this be done, the censure appears certain; but I can easily see that it will do no other harm than diminish the credit of the Sorbonne, and deprive it of that authority which is so necessary to it on other occasions.

Meanwhile, I leave you at perfect liberty to hold by the word proximate or not, just as you please; for I love you too much to persecute you under that pretext. If this account is



not displeasing to you, I shall continue to apprise you of all that happens. I am, &c.

LETTER II

Paris, January 29,

1656

SIR,

Just as I had sealed up my last letter, I received a visit from our old friend M. N-. Nothing could have happened more luckily for my curiosity; for he is thoroughly informed in the questions of the day and is completely in the secret of the Jesuits, at whose houses, including those of their leading men, he is a constant visitor. After having talked over the business which brought him to my house, I asked him to state, in a few words, what were the points in dispute between the two parties.

He immediately complied, and informed me that the principal points were two- the first about the proximate power, and the second about sufficient grace. I have enlightened you on the first of these points in my former letter and shall now speak of the second.

In one word, then, I found that their difference about sufficient grace may be defined thus: The Jesuits maintain that there is a grace given generally to all men, subject in such a way to free-will that the will renders it efficacious or inefficacious at its pleasure, without any additional aid from God and without wanting anything on his part in order to act effectively; and hence they term this grace sufficient, because it suffices of itself for action. The Jansenists, on the other hand, will not allow that any grace is actually

sufficient which is not also efficacious; that is, that all those kinds of grace which do not determine the will to act effectively are insufficient for action; for they hold that a man can never act without efficacious grace.

Such are the points in debate between the Jesuits and the Jansenists; and my next object was to ascertain the doctrine of the New Thomists. "It is rather an odd one," he said; "they agree with the Jesuits in admitting a sufficient grace given to all men; but they maintain, at the same time, that no man can act with this grace alone, but that, in order to do this, he must receive from God an efficacious grace which really determines his will to the action, and which God does not grant to all men." "So that, according to this doctrine," said I, "this grace is sufficient without being sufficient." "Exactly so," he replied; "for if it suffices, there is no need of anything more for acting; and if it does not suffice, why- it is not sufficient."

"But," asked I, "where, then, is the difference between them and the Jansenists?" "They differ in this," he replied, "that the Dominicans have this good qualification, that they do not refuse to say that all men have the sufficient grace." "I understand you," returned I; "but they say it without thinking it; for they add that, in order to act, we must have an efficacious grace which is not given to all, consequently, if they agree with the Jesuits in the use of a term which has no sense, they differ from them and coincide with the Jansenists in the substance of the thing. That is very true," said he. "How, then," said I, "are the Jesuits united with them? and why do they not combat them as well as the Jansenists, since they will always find powerful antagonists

in these men, who, by maintaining the necessity of the efficacious grace which determines the will, will prevent them from establishing that grace which they hold to be of itself sufficient?"

"The Dominicans are too powerful," he replied, "and the Jesuits are too politic, to come to an open rupture with them. The Society is content with having prevailed on them so far as to admit the name of sufficient grace, though they understand it in another sense; by which manoeuvre they gain this advantage, that they will make their opinion appear untenable, as soon as they judge it proper to do so. And this will be no difficult matter; for, let it be once granted that all men have the sufficient graces, nothing can be more natural than to conclude that the efficacious grace is not necessary to action- the sufficiency of the general grace precluding the necessity of all others. By saying sufficient we express all that is necessary for action; and it will serve little purpose for the Dominicans to exclaim that they attach another sense to the expression; the people, accustomed to the common acceptation of that term, would not even listen to their explanation. Thus the Society gains a sufficient advantage from the expression which has been adopted by the Dominicans, without pressing them any further; and were you but acquainted with what passed under Popes Clement VIII and Paul V, and knew how the Society was thwarted by the Dominicans in the establishment of the sufficient grace, you would not be surprised to find that it avoids embroiling itself in quarrels with them and allows them to hold their own opinion, provided that of the Society is left untouched; and more especially, when the

Dominicans countenance its doctrine, by agreeing to employ, on all public occasions, the term sufficient grace.

"The Society," he continued, "is quite satisfied with their complaisance. It does not insist on their denying the necessity of efficacious grace, this would be urging them too far. People should not tyrannize over their friends; and the Jesuits have gained quite enough. The world is content with words; few think of searching into the nature of things; and thus the name of sufficient grace being adopted on both sides, though in different senses, there is nobody, except the most subtle theologians, who ever dreams of doubting that the thing signified by that word is held by the Jacobins as well as by the Jesuits; and the result will show that these last are not the greatest dupes."

I acknowledged that they were a shrewd class of people, these Jesuits; and, availing myself of his advice, I went straight to the Jacobins, at whose gate I found one of my good friends, a staunch Jansenist (for you must know I have got friends among all parties), who was calling for another monk, different from him whom I was in search of. I prevailed on him, however, after much entreaty, to accompany me, and asked for one of my New Thomists. He was delighted to see me again. "How now! my dear father," I began, "it seems it is not enough that all men have a proximate power, with which they can never act with effect; they must have besides this a sufficient grace, with which they can act as little. Is not that the doctrine of your school?" "It is," said the worthy monk; "and I was upholding it this very morning in the Sorbonne. I spoke on the point during my whole half-hour; and, but for the sand-glass, I

bade fair to have reversed that wicked proverb, now so current in Paris: 'He votes without speaking, like a monk in the Sorbonne.'" "What do you mean by your half-hour and your sand-glass?" I asked; "do they cut your speeches by a certain measure?" "Yes," said he, "they have done so for some days past." "And do they oblige you to speak for half an hour?" "No; we may speak as little as we please." "But not as much as you please, said I. "O what a capital regulation for the boobies! what a blessed excuse for those who have nothing worth the saying! But, to return to the point, father; this grace given to all men is sufficient, is it not?" "Yes," said he. "And yet it has no effect without efficacious grace?" "None whatever," he replied. "And all men have the sufficient," continued I, "and all have not the efficacious?" "Exactly," said he. "That is," returned I, "all have enough of grace, and all have not enough of it that is, this grace suffices, though it does not suffice- that is, it is sufficient in name and insufficient in effect! In good sooth, father, this is particularly subtle doctrine! Have you forgotten, since you retired to the cloister, the meaning attached, in the world you have quitted, to the word sufficient? don't you remember that it includes all that is necessary for acting? But no, you cannot have lost all recollection of it; for, to avail myself of an illustration which will come home more vividly to your feelings, let us suppose that you were supplied with no more than two ounces of bread and a glass of water daily, would you be quite pleased with your prior were he to tell you that this would be sufficient to support you, under the pretext that, along with something else, which however, he would not give you, you

would have all that would be necessary to support you? How, then can you allow yourselves to say that all men have sufficient grace for acting, while you admit that there is another grace absolutely necessary to acting which all men have not? Is it because this is an unimportant article of belief, and you leave all men at liberty to believe that efficacious grace is necessary or not, as they choose? Is it a matter of indifference to say, that with sufficient grace a man may really act?" "How!" cried the good man; "indifference! it is heresy- formal heresy. The necessity of efficacious grace for acting effectively, is a point of faith- it is heresy to deny it."

"Where are we now?" I exclaimed; "and which side am I to take here? If I deny the sufficient grace, I am a Jansenist. If I admit it, as the Jesuits do, in the way of denying that efficacious grace is necessary, I shall be a heretic, say you. And if I admit it, as you do, in the way of maintaining the necessity of efficacious grace, I sin against common sense, and am a blockhead, say the Jesuits. What must I do, thus reduced to the inevitable necessity of being a blockhead, a heretic, or a Jansenist? And what a sad pass are matters come to, if there are none but the Jansenists who avoid coming into collision either with the faith or with reason, and who save themselves at once from absurdity and from error!"

My Jansenist friend took this speech as a good omen and already looked upon me as a convert. He said nothing to me, however; but, addressing the monk: "Pray, father," inquired he, "what is the point on which you agree with the Jesuits?" "We agree in this," he replied, "that the Jesuits and

we acknowledge the sufficient grace given to all." "But," said the Jansenist, "there are two things in this expression sufficient grace- there is the sound, which is only so much breath; and there is the thing which it signifies, which is real and effectual. And, therefore, as you are agreed with the Jesuits in regard to the word sufficient and opposed to them as to the sense, it is apparent that you are opposed to them in regard to the substance of that term, and that you only agree with them as to the sound. Is this what you call acting sincerely and cordially?"

"But," said the good man, "what cause have you to complain, since we deceive nobody by this mode of speaking? In our schools we openly teach that we understand it in a manner different from the Jesuits."

"What I complain of," returned my friend "is, that you do not proclaim it everywhere, that by sufficient grace you understand the grace which is not sufficient. You are bound in conscience, by thus altering the sense of the ordinary terms of theology, to tell that, when you admit a sufficient grace in all men, you understand that they have not sufficient grace in effect. All classes of persons in the world understand the word sufficient in one and the same sense; the New Thomists alone understand it in another sense. All the women, who form one-half of the world, all courtiers, all military men, all magistrates, all lawyers, merchants, artisans, the whole populace- in short, all sorts of men, except the Dominicans, understand the word sufficient to express all that is necessary. Scarcely any one is aware of this singular exception. It is reported over the whole earth, simply that the Dominicans hold that all men have the

sufficient graces. What other conclusion can be drawn from this, than that they hold that all men have all the graces necessary for action; especially when they are seen joined in interest and intrigue with the Jesuits, who understand the thing in that sense? Is not the uniformity of your expressions, viewed in connection with this union of party, a manifest indication and confirmation of the uniformity of your sentiments?

"The multitude of the faithful inquire of theologians: What is the real condition of human nature since its corruption? St. Augustine and his disciples reply that it has no sufficient grace until God is pleased to bestow it. Next come the Jesuits, and they say that all have the effectually sufficient graces. The Dominicans are consulted on this contrariety of opinion; and what course do they pursue? They unite with the Jesuits; by this coalition they make up a majority; they secede from those who deny these sufficient graces; they declare that all men possess them. Who, on hearing this, would imagine anything else than that they gave their sanction to the opinion of the Jesuits? And then they add that, nevertheless, these said sufficient graces are perfectly useless without the efficacious, which are not given to all!

"Shall I present you with a picture of the Church amidst these conflicting sentiments? I consider her very like a man who, leaving his native country on a journey, is encountered by robbers, who inflict many wounds on him and leave him half dead. He sends for three physicians resident in the neighboring towns. The first, on probing his wounds, pronounces them mortal and assures him that none but God



can restore to him his lost powers. The second, coming after the other, chooses to flatter the man- tells him that he has still sufficient strength to reach his home; and, abusing the first physician who opposed his advice, determines upon his ruin. In this dilemma, the poor patient, observing the third medical gentleman at a distance, stretches out his hands to him as the person who should determine the controversy. This practitioner, on examining his wounds, and ascertaining the opinions of the first two doctors, embraces that of the second, and uniting with him, the two combine against the first, and being the stronger party in number drive him from the field in disgrace. From this proceeding, the patient naturally concludes that the last comer is of the same opinion with the second; and, on putting the question to him, he assures him most positively that his strength is sufficient for prosecuting his journey. The wounded man, however, sensible of his own weakness, begs him to explain to him how he considered him sufficient for the journey. 'Because,' replies his adviser, 'you are still in possession of your legs, and legs are the organs which naturally suffice for walking.' 'But,' says the patient, 'have I all the strength necessary to make use of my legs? for, in my present weak condition, it humbly appears to me that they are wholly useless.' 'Certainly you have not,' replies the doctor; 'you will never walk effectively, unless God vouchsafes some extraordinary assistance to sustain and conduct you.' 'What!' exclaims the poor man, 'do you not mean to say that I have sufficient strength in me, so as to want for nothing to walk effectively?' 'Very far from it,' returns the physician. 'You must, then,' says the patient, 'be of a different opinion

from your companion there about my real condition.' 'I must admit that I am,' replies the other.

"What do you suppose the patient said to this? Why, he complained of the strange conduct and ambiguous terms of this third physician. He censured him for taking part with the second, to whom he was opposed in sentiment, and with whom he had only the semblance of agreement, and for having driven away the first doctor, with whom he in reality agreed; and, after making a trial of strength, and finding by experience his actual weakness, he sent them both about their business, recalled his first adviser, put himself under his care, and having, by his advice, implored from God the strength of which he confessed his need, obtained the mercy he sought, and, through divine help, reached his house in peace.

The worthy monk was so confounded with this parable that he could not find words to reply. To cheer him up a little, I said to him, in a mild tone: "But after all, my dear father, what made you think of giving the name of sufficient to a grace which you say it is a point of faith to believe is, in fact, insufficient?" "It is very easy for you to talk about it," said he. "You are an independent and private man; I am a monk and in a community- cannot you estimate the difference between the two cases? We depend on superiors; they depend on others. They have promised our votes- what would you have to become of me?" We understood the hint; and this brought to our recollection the case of his brother monk, who, for a similar piece of indiscretion, has been exiled to Abbeville.

"But," I resumed, "how comes it about that your community is bound to admit this grace?" "That is another question," he replied. "All that I can tell you is, in one word, that our order has defended, to the utmost of its ability, the doctrine of St. Thomas on efficacious grace. With what ardor did it oppose, from the very commencement, the doctrine of Molina? How did it labor to establish the necessity of the efficacious grace of Jesus Christ? Don't you know what happened under Clement VIII and Paul V, and how, the former having been prevented by death, and the latter hindered by some Italian affairs from publishing his bull, our arms still sleep in the Vatican? But the Jesuits, availing themselves, since the introduction of the heresy of Luther and Calvin, of the scanty light which the people possess for discriminating between the error of these men and the truth of the doctrine of St. Thomas, disseminated their principles with such rapidity and success that they became, ere long, masters of the popular belief; while we, on our part, found ourselves in the predicament of being denounced as Calvinists and treated as the Jansenists are at present, unless we qualified the efficacious grace with, at least, the apparent avowal of a sufficient. In this extremity, what better course could we have taken for saving the truth, without losing our own credit, than by admitting the name of sufficient grace, while we denied that it was such in effect? Such is the real history of the case."

This was spoken in such a melancholy tone that I really began to pity the man; not so, however, my companion. "Flatter not yourselves," said he to the monk, "with having saved the truth; had she not found other defenders, in your

feeble hands she must have perished. By admitting into the Church the name of her enemy, you have admitted the enemy himself. Names are inseparable from things. If the term sufficient grace be once established, it will be vain for you to protest that you understand by it a grace which is not sufficient. Your protest will be held inadmissible. Your explanation would be scouted as odious in the world, where men speak more ingenuously about matters of infinitely less moment. The Jesuits will gain a triumph- it will be their grace, which is sufficient in fact, and not yours, which is only so in name, that will pass as established; and the converse of your creed will become an article of faith."

"We will all suffer martyrdom first," cried the father, "rather than consent to the establishment of sufficient grace in the sense of the Jesuits. St. Thomas, whom we have sworn to follow even to the death, is diametrically opposed to such doctrine."

To this my friend, who took up the matter more seriously than I did, replied: "Come now, father, your fraternity has received an honor which it sadly abuses. It abandons that grace which was confided to its care, and which has never been abandoned since the creation of the world. That victorious grace, which was waited for by the patriarchs, predicted by the prophets, introduced by Jesus Christ, preached by St. Paul, explained by St. Augustine, the greatest of the fathers, embraced by his followers, confirmed by St. Bernard, the last of the fathers, supported by St. Thomas, the angel of the schools, transmitted by him to your order, maintained by so many of your fathers, and so nobly defended by your monks under Popes Clement and

Paul- that efficacious grace, which had been committed as a sacred deposit into your hands, that it might find, in a sacred and everlasting order, a succession of preachers, who might proclaim it to the end of time- is discarded and deserted for interests the most contemptible. It is high time for other hands to arm in its quarrel. It is time for God to raise up intrepid disciples of the Doctor of grace, who, strangers to the entanglements of the world, will serve God for God's sake. Grace may not, indeed, number the Dominicans among her champions, but champions she shall never want; for, by her own almighty energy, she creates them for herself. She demands hearts pure and disengaged; nay, she herself purifies and disengages them from worldly interests, incompatible with the truths of the Gospel. Reflect seriously, on this, father; and take care that God does not remove this candlestick from its place, leaving you in darkness and without the crown, as a punishment for the coldness which you manifest to a cause so important to his Church."

He might have gone on in this strain much longer, for he was kindling as he advanced, but I interrupted him by rising to take my leave and said: "Indeed, my dear father, had I any influence in France, I should have it proclaimed, by sound of trumpet: 'BE IT KNOWN TO ALL MEN, that when the Jacobins SAY that sufficient grace is given to all, they MEAN that all have not the grace which actually suffices!' After which, you might say it often as you please, but not otherwise." And thus ended our visit.

You will perceive, therefore, that we have here a politic sufficiency somewhat similar to proximate power. Meanwhile

I may tell you that it appears to me that both the proximate power and this same sufficient grace may be safely doubted by anybody, provided he is not a Jacobin.

I have just come to learn, when closing my letter, that the censure has passed. But as I do not yet know in what terms it is worded, and as it will not be published till the 15th of February, I shall delay writing you about it till the next post. I am, &c.

REPLY OF THE "PROVINCIAL"

TO THE FIRST TWO LETTERS OF HIS FRIEND

February 2,

1656

SIR,

Your two letters have not been confined to me. Everybody has seen them, everybody understands them, and everybody believes them. They are not only in high repute among theologians- they have proved agreeable to men of the world, and intelligible even to the ladies.

In a communication which I lately received from one of the gentlemen of the Academy- one of the most illustrious names in a society of men who are all illustrious- who had seen only your first letter, he writes me as follows: "I only wish that the Sorbonne, which owes so much to the memory of the late cardinal, would acknowledge the jurisdiction of his French Academy. The author of the letter would be satisfied; for, in the capacity of an academician, I would authoritatively condemn, I would banish, I would proscribe- I had almost said exterminate- to the extent of my power, this proximate power, which makes so much noise about