

already noticed, the *craving for infallibility* in religious matters.

It is true, that hardly any one is found who in words claims or expects to be personally infallible; still we may truly say, that there is in human nature a craving for infallibility; because it is perfectly evident, that he who is infallibly following an infallible guide is himself infallible. If his decisions on each point agree exactly with those of an authority which cannot be mistaken, then it is quite obvious that *his decisions must be infallibly right*. But this, though self-evident as soon as stated, is sometimes lost sight of in practice; a man will speak of himself as being fallible—that is, liable to make mistakes, and as having no expectation of being otherwise. But if he be quite certain that he has an infallible guide to whom he can always apply, and whom he constantly and accurately follows, his meaning must be, that he *would be fallible if left to himself*. But actually and practically he does consider himself infallible.

Though the gnomon [or upright part] of a sun-dial has no power in itself to show the hour, yet, when the sun shines upon it, the motions of its shadow must be as correct as those of the sun's rays which it follows. And, in like manner, he is infallible, practically, in his belief, who always believes exactly what an infallible church or leader believes.

This craving, then, for infallibility, inclines men beforehand to receive the pretensions, either of a supposed infallible Church, or of those who claim or who promise immediate inspiration. And, accordingly, some persons waver for a time between these two kinds of pretensions, and at last give in to the one or to the other. And, again, you may find persons changing from the one to the other, and sometimes thus changing more than once; and it might be added, that one may find instances of the same individual, himself unchanged, exposed to severe blame, at different times, not only from different persons, but even from the same; first for refusing to join the one party, and afterwards for refusing to join the other most opposed to it; both parties, much as they are opposed to each other, still always clinging to the confident expectation of finding that infallibility above spoken of. They are *inquiring* only after a way of freeing themselves from the trouble of all further inquiry. Their *care* is only to relieve themselves, in the end, from all further need of watchful care. They are like men in a ship, searching for a perfectly safe harbour, in which the helm may be abandoned, and the ship left to ride securely, without any need of watching the winds and currents, and of looking out for rocks and shoals. They hope to obtain, in all ages of the Church, that freedom from all need of watchful circumspection, which was not granted even in the age of the Apostles; for we find that, even when there were these infallible guides on earth, Christians are perpetually warned of the danger of mistaking "false Apostles" for true.

But the flattering promise of the infallible guidance here spoken of, not only meets man's wishes, but, as observed before, his expectations also. When we allow our thoughts to run on in our mind without restraint, we are apt to think that God is as *likely* to provide for us such a guide, as we are to wish for it.

If, before they knew anything about what God has revealed in the Bible, men were asked what kind of revelation they would *wish* to obtain, and again, what kind of revelation they would think it the most reasonable and *probable* that God should bestow, they would be likely to answer *both* questions by saying, "Such a revelation as should provide some infallible guide on earth, easily found by every man; so that no one could possibly be in doubt, on any point, as to what he was required to believe and to do; but should be placed, as it were, on a kind of plain high-road, which he would only have to follow steadily, without taking any care to look around him; or, rather, in some kind of conveyance on such a road, in which he would be safely carried to his journey's end, even though asleep, provided he never quitted that conveyance. For," a man might say, "if a book is put into my hands containing a divine revelation, and in which are passages that may be differently understood by different persons, even by those of learning and ability, even by men professing each to have earnestly prayed for spiritual guidance towards the right understanding of it; and if, moreover, this book contains, in respect of some points of belief and of conduct, no directions at all, then there is a manifest *necessity* that I should be provided with an infallible interpreter to explain this book, who shall be always at hand, to be consulted, and ready to teach me, without the possibility of mistake, the right meaning of every passage, and to supply all deficiencies and omissions in the book itself. For, otherwise, this revelation is, to me, no revelation at all. Though the book itself be perfectly free from all mixture of error—though all that it asserts be true, and all its directions right—still, it is no guide for me, unless I have an infallible certainty, on each point, what its assertions and directions are. It is in vain to tell me that the pole-star is always fixed in the north; I cannot steer my course by it, when it is covered by clouds; so that I cannot be certain where that star is. I need a *compass* to steer by, which I can consult at all

times. There is, therefore, a manifest necessity for an infallible interpreter on earth, whom every one can easily go to, as an essential part of any Divine revelation." Such would be the thoughts, and such the feelings, of a man left to himself to consider what sort of revelation from heaven would be most acceptable, and, also, the most *probable*—the best fitted to meet his *wishes* and his *wants*. And thus are men inclined, at the outset, both by their feelings and their thoughts, beforehand, to admit such pretensions as have been above alluded to.

And it may be added, that any one who is thus induced to give himself up entirely to the guidance of such a supposed infallible authority, without presuming ever after to exercise his own judgment on any point relative to religion, or to think for himself at all on such matters—such a one will be likely to regard this as the very perfection of pious *humility*—as a most reverent observance of the rule which says, "Lean not to thine own understanding;" though, in reality, it is the very error of improperly leaning to our own understanding; for, to resolve to believe that God *must* have dealt with mankind just in the way that *we* could wish, as the most *desirable*, and in the way that to us seems the most *probable*—this is, in fact, to *set up ourselves as his judges*. It is to dictate to him, in the spirit of Naaman, who thought that the prophet Elisha would recover him by a touch, and who chose to be healed by the waters of Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, which he deemed better than all the waters of Israel.

But anything that falls in at once with men's *wishes*, and with their *expectations*, and which also presents itself to them with the appearance of a *virtuous humility*—this they are often found readily and firmly to believe, not only *without* evidence, but *against* all evidence.

And thus it is, in the present case. The notion that every revelation from heaven, necessarily requires an infallible interpreter always at hand, to explain it, without which we cannot possibly understand it—this notion clings so strongly to the minds of many men, that they are even found still to maintain it, after they have ceased to believe in any revelation at all, or even in the existence of a God. There can be no doubt of the fact, that very great numbers of men are to be found—they are much more numerous in some parts of the Continent than among us—men not wanting in understanding, nor altogether without thought, who, while they, for the most part, join outwardly in the religion of those about them, are inwardly entire unbelievers in Christianity, yet still hold to the notion—which, in fact, has had the chief share in *making* them unbelievers—that a *DIVINE REVELATION* without an *INFALLIBLE INTERPRETER* always at hand, to explain it to every one, is such a thing as no one would think of; and that the one without the other is an absurdity, and a contradiction.

And this notion it is, as we have said, that has mainly contributed to *make* these men unbelievers. For, when a sensible and thoughtful man has fully satisfied himself that, in point of fact, no such provision has been made—that no infallible interpreter, within every one's reach, does exist on earth (and this is a conclusion which even the very words of Paul, in his discourse at Miletus, which we are now considering—Acts xx.—would be alone fully sufficient to prove), when he has satisfied himself that such an explainer does *not exist*, yet still continues to think that it is *necessary*, the consequence is unavoidable, that he will at once give up all belief of Christianity. The ideas of a *REVELATION* from God, and of an unerring *interpreter* to explain it, being, in his mind, inseparably joined, the overthrow of the one belief cannot but carry the other along with it. Such a person, therefore, will be apt to think it not worth while to examine the reasons in favour of any other form of Christianity, which does *not* pretend to offer him an infallible interpreter. This—which he is fully convinced is absolutely required by a revelation from heaven—is by some churches *claimed* but *not proved*, while the rest do not even claim it. The pretensions of the one, he has listened to and deliberately rejected; those of the other, he regards as not even worth listening to.

The system, then, of arguing from our own suppositions, as to the necessity of the Most High doing so and so, is likely to lead a man first to throw aside his own form of Christianity, and then to give up revelation altogether. But does it stop there? Does not the same system also lead naturally to Atheism, or the entire denial of the existence of a God? Experience shows that that consequence, which reason might have led us to expect, does often actually take place. He who allows himself to think freely as to what he *may consider to be necessary*, and argues from that, will be likely to find a necessity for such divine interference in the affairs of the world, as does not in fact take place. He will deem it no less than necessary, that an almighty and an all-wise and good Being should interfere to rescue the oppressed from the oppressor—the corrupted from the corrupter—to deliver men from such temptations to evil as it is impossible, from their nature, they should withstand by their own unassisted strength; and, in short, to banish *evil* from the universe. And, since this is not done, he

thinks it plain, that there cannot possibly be a God, and that to believe otherwise is a gross absurdity. Such a belief he may, indeed, consider as useful for keeping up a wholesome fear in the minds of the common people; and, for their sakes, he may outwardly profess Christianity also, even as the heathen philosophers of old endeavoured to keep up the common superstitions; but a real belief he will regard as something impossible to a sensible and thoughtful mind.

It is not meant that all, or the greater part of those who hold the notion here spoken of, are Atheists. We all know how common it is for men not to go all the way, that some notion, whether good or bad, which they have taken up, would lead them; how common to argue stoutly for opinions, without seeing what must follow from them, if carried out to the end. But we are here trying to show what the *notion* itself may naturally lead to: and there have been many sad instances which prove, that the danger is real and great, of its bringing men at last to be Atheists.

(To be continued.)

DOES THE ROMAN CHURCH REALLY BELIEVE IN ITS OWN CLAIM TO THE POSSESSION OF AN INFALLIBLE GUIDE?

[From the *Irish Ecclesiastical Journal*, with some additions by the Author.]

There cannot be a question that all men would naturally wish to have an universal, infallible guide in religion, to decide all controversies, condemn all heresy, and destroy all danger of error or mistake in a matter of such moment as religious faith.

We see men every day pin their faith to the skirts of teachers whom they admit to be as fallible as themselves, which of itself is a clear proof that they would gladly follow the guidance of any one who could show any plausible pretence to infallibility.

We know, also, with what wonderful facility men receive, in all ages, the pretensions of those who boldly set up to be prophets, and claim to be the recipients of immediate inspiration. Witness the rapid spread of Mormonism in our own times—a religion, founded upon pretences to inspiration, as shallow, and as ill-sustained by anything like real evidence, as can well be imagined.

It is not wonderful, therefore, that the pretensions of the Church of Rome to this great gift, supported as they are by bold assertion and the dogmatic teaching of centuries, should have many followers. At least the circumstance that Rome has numerous followers, is of itself no evidence that such pretensions are true. The wonder is, that there are so many who do not receive these pretensions, when we consider how ready men are to accept a claim, in itself so desirable, and which, if true, would relieve them from so much danger and responsibility. When we see men so willing to invest with all the attributes of infallibility the teachers or systems they have chosen to follow, even whilst they admit, and loudly profess to believe, that those teachers and systems are fallible, the wonder is, not that an ecclesiastical tribunal claiming infallibility should have followers, but that there should be any who refuse to accept its guidance.

When the vender of an universal medicine announces that he is in the possession of a compound capable of curing all the diseases to which mortality is subject, it is not wonderful that some men become purchasers, were it only for the chance of obtaining so great a benefit. But when a large portion of the public remain indifferent to him, as we cannot suppose them insensible to the great advantages of a medicine of universal and infallible efficacy, we are forced to conclude, either that they disbelieve the alleged qualities of the medicine, or that they had given it a trial and found it to be a cheat.

Again, if a man profess to have the power of commencing the baser metals into gold, it is not wonderful that some should flock to him, in the hope, if not the belief, that he might communicate to them so desirable a secret. But if men, suffering under debt or poverty, are found to treat his promises with contempt, we may be assured, that it is not from indifference to the end proposed, but from an absolute disbelief in the powers of the alchemist, that they neglect to avail themselves of his boasted science.

But suppose we find on closer inquiry that the wife and children of the proprietor of the universal medicine are languishing at home, of some very common disease, and that he has never once thought of administering to them his panacea; or suppose we find that the great alchemist is himself starving with poverty in a garret, whilst he professes to teach others the art of converting old nails and useless brass or copper into gold, a further suspicion is created in our minds; we begin to see that the vender of the medicine, and the maker of gold, *have no faith in their own pretensions*—they are eloquent in public upon the virtues of their respective powers, in hope of obtaining money from the credulity of others, but in private, and in their own homes, they are utter disbelievers in themselves.

Now, this is exactly the case of the Church of Rome. Her divines are loud in the assertion of her claim to the possession of an infallible tribunal for the decision of all controversies; and they have many followers, because

all would be rejoiced to be under the protection of such a power, and many are content to place themselves under its guidance, as a relief to their perplexities, or to save themselves the labour of inquiry, on the chance that such pretensions may be true. But others doubt, or refuse to believe, not because they are indifferent to the claim (unless they be indifferent to religion itself), but because they are of opinion—some, that the evidences of the claim are insufficient to support it; others, that a fair and extensive trial having been made of it, it has been found to be a failure or a cheat.

But then occurs the other question. Do the advocates of this claim really believe in it themselves? Does the Church of Rome practically believe herself to possess the infallible power of deciding controversies, of which she so loudly boasts? Can we follow her to her home, and ascertain whether she administers to her own children and household the medicine, of which she claims to be the sole vender? Does she apply her philosopher's stone to relieve the poverty and nakedness of her own secret chambers?

If we find that she does not—that the children of Rome are perishing of the same diseases which afflict the rest of mankind—perplexed with the same controversies, doubts, and difficulties amongst themselves, which are to be found in other communions, and nevertheless, that they never think of seeking to their boasted infallible tribunal for a solution of their perplexities; if we find that even the infallible tribunal itself does not think it advisable to interfere for the relief of its doubting children, but, on the contrary, sits still and suffers them to fight out their controversies like other folk, then must we be convinced either that the possession of this gift of infallibility is, after all, no such great advantage, or that its pretended possessors are no real believers in themselves.

1. For example, we are taunted by Romanists with the necessary imperfections of vernacular versions of the Bible. They are, it is said, the work of men confessedly fallible; they are liable to many errors; the faithful, therefore, in reading them are reading, not the infallible Word of God, but a version of that word, made by fallible and erring men, and therefore, fallible and erroneous like its authors.

Well, then, suppose this to be so, what more important case can be conceived for the exercise of an infallible judgment than to secure the Church from this danger by providing vernacular versions which shall be purged from all error? Yet this we are told the infallibility of Rome is unable to effect. Bellarmine, the warmest advocate of the Ultramontane pretence to infallibility, admits its failure here. He tells us that this weakness of their boasted infallibility is one cause why the Roman Church refuses to its laity, of different nations and languages, vernacular versions of the Scripture in their respective tongues—"Because (says he) vernacular languages are subject to continual change; versions, therefore, in vernacular languages, ought to be continually altered to suit them to the variations of the languages. But this would be impossible, for want of competent translators, and thus many and irremediable errors would be occasioned, since neither Popes nor Councils are able to judge of so many languages."

So, then, on this most important point, the infallible judge is at fault, and Rome, with her boasted power of deciding all difficulties and controversies, confesses herself unable to provide her children with versions of the Bible without the very same risk of error which her divines represent as the peculiar disadvantage of the Protestant translator. But here we find, by Bellarmine's confession, that Popes and Council can do no better—their gift of infallibility fails them here; they can only trust, like ourselves, to the qualifications of the translators; for "they are unable to judge of so many languages." *Habemus confitentem reum.*

In what, then, is the condition of the Roman laity better than our own, in reference to vernacular versions? One version, in a language which was partially vernacular in Europe some centuries ago, is authorized and pronounced "authentic," or infallible. But this version is now as unintelligible to the great mass of the people as the Hebrew or Greek originals; and if versions of this version in the modern languages of Europe are partially and sparingly allowed, they are allowed solely on the responsibility of the individual translators; the infallible judge has carefully abstained from giving them any real sanction, and they who use them must take them, as we take ours, on the character for learning and integrity of the individual translators.

2. Again, with respect to other controversies, when we look at the internal history of the Roman communion, we do not find that its members possess any very transcendent advantages over ourselves. The Jesuits and Dominicans, the Jesuits and Jansenists, the Dominicans and Franciscans, and other great contending parties, were allowed to work out their several controversies just as they would have been allowed to work them out if they had been Protestants. No infallible

authority interposed to allay the storm, to calm the virulence of party spirit, or to settle for ever on which side truth was to be found. Troublesome questions were hushed up, and troublesome individuals silenced or put out of the way by various calumnies or artifices, and sometimes by persecution or imprisonment, with even more of unjustifiable violence than is usual in other communions. And this we are told was because the questions at issue were merely matters of theological opinion, and not *de fide*, or articles of faith. They were of sufficient importance, however, in the eyes of the contending parties, to justify them in embroiling kingdoms, shedding the blood of thousands, burning monasteries, desecrating churches, polluting the graves of saints, plundering villages, and breaking the sacred bond of unity and charity among Christians—nay, the Reformation itself, is asserted by its bitterest opponents to have been the immediate consequence of one of these contests.

If, then, the infallibility of Rome is either too weak or too slow in its operation to settle such controversies as these, we may well ask, what great advantage has the Roman Church in the possession of such a power? If the infallible tribunal can only interfere in the last extremity, when an article of faith is at stake, and if it must sit still and allow all inferior controversies to grow and fester, until at length they attain to the degree of virulence which undermines the faith, it is surely not too much to say, that such a power, so limited in its exercise, but ill deserves the vaunting boasts of its zealous advocates. Nine out of ten of our most bitter controversies relate to subjects which are not *de fide*; and for these (by the showing of their own divines) we can look for no decision from Roman infallibility.

3. And yet there is one controversy still unsettled, which one would think ought to be regarded as of sufficient importance to be dealt with as fundamental; I mean the doctrine of infallibility itself. But upon this subject, all important as it is, the Roman infallible tribunal has as yet given no infallible decision. Divines are still in the dark, both as to the precise seat of the infallibility, and as to the occasions in which we are to look for or expect its interference. This, to say the least, is suspicious. Does the Roman Church really believe in her own pretended powers? Her infallible decisions (it would seem) are made for those only who refuse to receive them; but for her own children, for those who profess to believe in her infallibility, she decides nothing; not even in reference to the seat and nature of this very infallibility itself. They may have controversies amongst themselves as fierce and vehement, to say the least, as any that ever raged elsewhere; but no infallible decision is vouchsafed to calm their turbulence. If they are sound in the fundamentals of the faith, they can look for no help in minor matters, however important, from the infallible tribunal. The infallible judge meddles not with those questions which are not *de fide*. In other words, he speaks only for those who refuse to receive his decisions. He ministers no relief to the perplexities of his own children or subjects. Does Rome, then, really believe herself to be as infallible as her divines pretend?

4. One of the most important benefits to be looked for from the possession of an infallible guide in religion, to the members of the communion so privileged, would, doubtless, be a provision for infallible public instruction; the catechisms, the liturgical offices, and books of devotion, the sermons of such a communion will, certainly, we would say, be jealously guarded by the gift of infallibility, and nothing erroneous or unsound will be admitted into these mainsprings and fountain-heads of Christian life.

But when we come to examine the actual practice of the Church of Rome in these matters, we find that her supposed infallible tribunal gives her no advantage in this respect over other churches. Her catechisms are composed by fallible men, and are taught to her children by men as fallible. Her devotional offices, even the Breviary services appointed for the devotions of her priesthood, her very liturgy, ancient and venerable as it is, do not profess to have the sanction of the infallible authority. And the sermons, or public teaching of her clergy, are confessedly, like those of other communions, the private opinions of the individual preacher. What advantage, then, have the members of the Roman Church from the boasted infallibility of which they pretend to be the possessors? If an objection is made to some childish legend of the Breviary, if we detect a catechism in a manifest error, or a preacher in a palpable extravagance or falsification of some authority, we are at once told that the Church is not responsible; that the infallible tribunal has not spoken through any such medium. We ask, then, why has she not? If (as Roman doctors pretend) there be in this Church this power of detecting all error, why not cut off error at its source, by supplying the laity with infallible instruction? Does it not seem strange that a communion, possessing the high privilege of infallibility, should, in the instruction of her people, in her devotions, in her public teaching, be confessedly in no way more protected from human error and infirmity, than we who have no such advantage? Either the infallible tribunal, of which she boasts, is unable to guard the laity from erroneous

teaching—and in that case we may fairly doubt whether the possession of such infallibility is so great an advantage as its advocates pretend—or else the Roman Church, by her caution in this department of what would seem to be her duty, clearly betrays her secret unbelief in her pretended privilege. Rome does not really believe in her own infallibility.

5. This will be more evident if we look into the internal dissensions of that communion. We shall find, not only that the possession of a power of appeal to an infallible tribunal, gives them no advantage whatsoever in calming the virulence of controversy; but that the contending parties, although both professing to believe themselves the subjects of an infallible judge, display no anxiety to obtain a final decision from him, but, on the contrary, make use of every artifice to delay or evade a sentence. The infallible tribunal itself also acts with the same caution which a synod or convocation of bishops pretending to no infallibility would naturally use, to bring matters to an amicable arrangement—leaving the question at first an open one; and exhorting the belligerent parties to moderation and mutual forbearance; issuing carefully-worded decrees, nicely contrived to say as little as possible, and to give a triumph to neither party; in short, we find the same arts of prudence and policy resorted to, which other people are forced to employ, who have no prerogative of infallibility to sanction their decisions.

All this shows an inward consciousness on both sides that the boasted gift of infallibility must be used with caution, lest they who profess to submit to, rather than to believe in it, should be driven to rebellion. In no part of the history of controversy within the Roman Church, do we see her act, either in her head or in her members, with the bold confidence of faith in her own infallible power that we might reasonably have expected. She acts rather with the caution of a lawyer, who desires to keep up as long as possible the acquiescence of others in a legal fiction; and in this light, there can be little doubt the claim of infallibility is practically regarded in the Roman communion; and contending parties avoid or delay a decision, because they know that such decision will not necessarily be the truth, although they know also that, whether true or false, they are bound to receive it as infallible.

(To be continued.)

CHALLENGE.

WHY DO THE IRISH PRIESTHOOD DECLINE PUBLIC DISCUSSIONS ON RELIGION?

INDIVIDUAL priests may not feel sufficient masters of the controversy, and, therefore, may reasonably decline, lest they should injure what they believe to be a good cause by weak advocacy. Others may decline, because they think that, even though the cause of *truth* might be advanced, the cause of *Christian charity* might be injured by the excitement of personal feelings almost inevitably connected with an oral discussion, in which the anxiety to gain a victory, or avoid a defeat, may drive men, even of a calm mind and temper, to use arguments of which they would in cooler moments be ashamed.

These motives we honour, and accept as fair grounds, and not mere excuses, for declining oral discussion.

The discussion which we propose and challenge, is one of a very different and, we believe, a wholly unexceptionable kind. It is, that any priest or bishop of the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland or England (the more able and learned the better), shall not orally, but in print, in our pages, come forward and discuss, in a *spirit of candour and Christian kindness*, the whole controversy, not hastily, but at full leisure. We do not ask the writers *publicly* to give their names: so that, if they fail, no personal disgrace will ensue, and their Church need not necessarily suffer; and there will, consequently, be the less temptation to lose temper, or use harsh language. All we require is, that Christian temper shall be preserved on both sides; and where authorities are cited, accurate references given to the volume, page, and exact edition, that time may not be lost in searching for the passages relied on. This we engage on our side to do.

Should this challenge be accepted in the spirit of fair play, in which it is proposed, we cannot but think that there is some little chance of intelligent Irishmen being able to decide for themselves which party is in the right, whichever side truth may really be on. On our side, we pledge ourselves to insist on nothing but what we may be able to prove, and shall not assume anything to be dogmatically true or false, until we have laid our grounds for such opinion before the judgment of our Christian readers. With infidels we have nothing to do, and do not propose to write for such. Nor shall we discuss matters in which the Churches of Rome and England are agreed. We shall, therefore, deem the following propositions as admitted and indisputable:—

- 1st. That the Old and New Testaments are the inspired Word of God. [The authority of the Apocrypha will be, of course, a subject open to discussion.]
- 2nd. The Doctrine of the Holy Trinity.
- 3rd. The Divinity and incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

* "Tot vero translationum mutationes sine gravissimo periculo et incommodo non fierent. Nam non semper inveniantur idonei interpretes; atque in multis erroribus committeretur qui non possent potius facile tolli, cum neque Pontifices neque concilia de tot linguis judicare possint."—Bellarmine. *De Verbo Dei*. lib. ii. c. 16, n. 33.