

from want of the habit of thinking, and whose minds have not been cultivated; and others from resolutely avoiding all reasoning and all examination, because they have determined to be believers, and consider their faith to be both the more praiseworthy and also the more safe, the less they reflect and examine. They fear the very danger above alluded to—that reasoning will lead to infidelity; and they seek to escape this danger, not by putting aside the false notion from which that reasoning sets out, but by avoiding all reasoning, and stopping all inquiry and reflection.

But this freedom from all uneasy doubt—a desire for which leads to the craving for infallibility—this, after all, is not always attained by such a plan of acting. A lurking suspicion will often remain in the mind, which a man vainly endeavours to stifle, that the foundation is not sound. The building, indeed, may be complete. Let it be once settled, that the Church, Sect, Party, or Leader, we have taken for our guide, is perfectly infallible, and there is an end of all doubts and cares respecting particular points. But an uneasy doubt will sometimes haunt a man, in spite of his endeavours to keep it down, and however earnestly he may deny, even to himself, its existence—whether the infallibility claimed, which is the foundation of the whole building, is really well established. A suspicion will occasionally cross the mind, however anxiously resisted, "IS THERE NOW, O LIE IN MY RIGHT HAND?" And the unwillingness often shown to examine the foundation, and ascertain whether it is really sound, is a proof, not of full confidence in its firmness, but of a lurking suspicion that it will not bear examination.

It is thus that the craving after the ease of mind produced by infallible certainty, is likely to defeat its own object. Many, however, no doubt, do really enjoy the confidence of mind which they boast of, though without any sufficient grounds for it. And many, we may expect, will complain of, and find fault with, and reject, what has been here said, on the ground that it is a "cheerless" doctrine. And this charge is, to a certain extent, true. To be told to "work out our own salvation with fear and trembling," may be less "cheering" than to be told, that we have no need for any fear and trembling. When Paul "ceased not for three years to warn every one, night and day, with TEARS," it was not, certainly, because he judged this to be the most cheering to his people, but because he knew it to be the most for their real good, and the most conformable to truth. It was precisely because he was aware that painstaking watchfulness is less agreeable than confident and boastful ease—it was for this very reason, doubtless, that he was so diligent in his warnings, lest any of his people should be—as so many are now, and in every age—led away blindfolded by their wishes, and flattered to their ruin by deceitful teachers. It is a common error, and one which men always need to be put on their guard against, to trust to boastful promises and to lean upon pleasant and cheering hopes, without examining well whether these promises and hopes can reasonably be depended on.

But it is the part of true wisdom not to lose, in a vain search after what Providence has denied us, the advantages which it does place within our reach.

Difficult indeed it is—or, rather, impossible—for us to understand why God has dealt with man as he has. We may be unable to answer the question, why the revelation he has bestowed has not been accompanied by the gift of an infallible interpreter on earth, within the reach of all men, and hindering all possibility of doubt as to the meaning of any part of it. It may be hard to explain why, both in this and in many other most important matters also, man should have been left to act on his own responsibility, and according to the best of his own fallible judgment; exposed to various dangers, and called on for the exercise of that watchful care, which, we find, is, in point of fact, often not exercised. We may be unable, in short, to understand why earth is not heaven—why evil of any kind is permitted to exist.

All this we may be unable to explain; but our inability to explain will not alter facts; and it is for us to make the best use of things as they are, instead of wondering or seeking to understand why they were not made otherwise.

That false humility above alluded to, the entire dependence on fallible man, must be discarded; and true humility must take its place. Instead of considering what, according to our notions, God must have done, or ought to have done, we should inquire what he has done; and what use we are allowed and expected to make of it.

If we inquire whether the Holy Scriptures did really come from him, we shall find proof abundantly sufficient to satisfy an honest and humble mind; but not sufficient—strange this may appear to us—to force conviction on the dishonest and proud. And if we inquire for what purposes the Scriptures were given, and how we are to make use of the gift, they will themselves abundantly teach us. They were evidently given us to enlighten the path of those who will open their eyes to the light, and take heed to their steps; but not of such as love darkness better than light, or view the light through the blackened glass of their own prejudices and inclinations,

or give themselves up to be led blindfold by blind guides. They were given not to make diligence and watchful care unnecessary, but to teach us to exercise them. They abound (as we have seen) in warnings of the danger of perversions and false doctrines. And they bid Christian ministers "take heed to themselves and to the flocks committed to their care." The pastor is to study, to the best of his power, to attain to the true meaning of them himself, and to explain that meaning to his people; but with a full conviction and confession of his own fallibility.

To complain of this—to reject or undervalue the revelation God has bestowed, urging that it is no revelation to us, or an insufficient one, because unerring certainty is not bestowed also—because we are required to exercise patient diligence and watchfulness, and candour, and humble self-distrust—this would be as unreasonable as to make light of and reject the bountiful gift of eye-sight, because men's eyes have sometimes deceived them—because men have mistaken a picture for the object imitated, or the dazzling mirage of the desert for a lake; and have fancied they had the evidence of sight for the sun's motion; and to conclude from all this that we ought to blindfold ourselves, and be led henceforth by some guide who pretends to be himself not liable to such mistakes.

The two great books—that of nature and that of revelation—which God has opened before us for our benefit, are, in this respect, like each other. Both are, in themselves, free from all error: but they do not give complete freedom from all possibility of error to the person who studies them. As the laws of nature are in themselves unchangeable, but yet are sometimes imperfectly known, and sometimes mistaken, by natural philosophers, so the Scriptures are in themselves infallible, but do not give infallibility to the student of them. Even by the most learned, they are in many parts imperfectly understood; by the "unlearned and unstable" they are liable to be "wrested to their own destruction."

We have, indeed, the gracious promise of God's Holy Spirit to "help our infirmities," both in respect of our faith and of our conduct; to guard us not only against error in doctrine or opinion, but also, no less, against sin; to further our growth both in grace, and also in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. And we are sure that, as far as we are under the guidance of that spirit, we cannot but be right both in our belief and our practice.

But how far we are in each instance, thus guided, we must not presume to pronounce with certainty. "It is God that worketh in us, both to will and to do" (and, we may add, to judge and believe also) "of his good pleasure;" but this is given by the Apostle as a reason, not for sitting down in careless and self-confident security, but that we should "work out our own salvation with fear and trembling." And this same anxious and diligent care must be shown, among other things, in our study of God's Holy Word.

"If we say that we have no sin"—and, equally, if we say that we have no error—"we deceive ourselves;" for, whatever part of our conduct, and of our opinions, may be, in fact, perfectly right, we are not authorized confidently to pronounce that it is so. "I judge not," says the Apostle Paul, "mine own self, for I know nothing by myself"—i.e., I am not conscious of any failure in my ministerial duties—"yet am I not hereby justified; but he that judgeth me is the Lord."

Let Christians, then, listen to this blessed Apostle; learn what he has taught; and attend to the warnings he has given. And let them not be persuaded by any one to think, that, by doing this, they will be thrown into distressing and incurable doubts and perplexities. Let them not fear that, by forbearing to forestall the judgment of the last day—by not presuming to dictate to the Most High, and boldly to pronounce in what way he must have given a revelation to man—by renouncing all pretensions to infallibility, whether immediate in themselves, or derived from others—by owning themselves to be neither beyond the reach of sin nor of error (both claims are alike groundless), and by consenting to undergo those trials of watchfulness, and of patience which God has appointed for them—let them not fear that by this they will forfeit all cheerful hope of final salvation, all "joy and peace in believing." The reverse of all this is the true state of the case.

As far as any one is conscious of striving, with humble prayer for divine aid, to do his best, in the way God has directed, he may reasonably hope to be preserved from all fatal errors and deadly sins; and he may trust that any mistakes into which he may have fallen, not through carelessness or perversity, but from mere error of judgment or unavoidable ignorance, will not be imputed to him as sins, but that he will "be accepted according to that he hath, and not according to that he hath not."

Those have, in reality, more to fear, who, professing to renounce all private judgment, have based their whole system of faith on human suppositions as to what a divine revelation must necessarily be; and who have shut their eyes to many plain warnings of our Lord and

his Apostles, "to take heed to ourselves." Paul has declared, that if even "an angel from heaven preach any other gospel than that which he has delivered, let him be accursed;" and he has left us a written record of his teachings, with which to compare whatever is proposed for our acceptance as gospel truth; and thus, according to our Lord's precept, judging of the tree by its fruits. Great, then, must be the danger of those who, in fact, reverse this precept, and judge of the fruits by the tree; by at once concluding, that whatever is taught by the Holy Church, or whatever such and such a person professes to have had revealed to him from heaven, and to be moved by the Holy Spirit to utter, must be gospel truth, however contrary to God's written Word.

And as their real danger is great, so they do not always succeed even in lulling themselves into complete ease of mind. While they crave for more than God has given, and will not be satisfied without that infallible certainty of freedom from error which would cut off all need of watchfulness against error, and of inquiry after truth, they often (besides raising on a false foundation a building of error) fail also of that confident repose and peace of mind which they have aimed at. And those, on the other hand, who, in true humility, set themselves to act exactly according to God's directions, will be partakers of his promised blessings. While such Christians as have sought rather for peace—for ease of mind and satisfaction—than for truth, will often fail both of truth and peace, those of the opposite disposition are more likely to attain both from their Gracious Master. He has taught us to "take heed that we be not deceived," and to "beware of false prophets;" and he has promised us his own peace and heavenly comfort. He has bid us to watch and pray: he has taught us, through his blessed Apostle, to "take heed to ourselves," and to "work out our salvation with fear and trembling;" and he has declared through the same Apostle, "that he worketh in us;" he has bid us rejoice in hope; he has promised that he "will not suffer us to be tempted above what we are able to bear;" and he has taught us to look forward to the time when we shall no longer "see as by means of a mirror 'darkly, but face to face'—when we shall know, not in part, but even as we are known (1 Cor. xiii. 12)—when faith shall be succeeded by certainty, and hope be ripened into enjoyment. His precepts and his promises go together. His support and comfort are given to those who seek for them in the way he has himself appointed. Let Christians, then, trust in God, and not transfer their allegiance to uninspired man. Let them search the Scriptures, (like the Bereans of old), "to see whether those things be so" which they are taught: "let them prove all things, and hold fast that which is right;" and not be led away, by bold assertions and arrogant pretensions, into those corruptions of gospel truth which will always, from time to time, arise within the Church. So shall they be enabled to "take up the serpents" they will meet with; and "if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them."

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

[From the *Irish Ecclesiastical Journal*.]

(Continued from page 9.)

The history of the controversy respecting the immaculate conception of the Blessed Virgin, will strikingly illustrate the remarks which we have already made. In the beginning of the fourteenth century the famous Franciscan schoolman, John Scot, had stated the matter thus:—God (he said) was able either to exempt the Virgin altogether from original sin, or to suffer her to remain under it for an infinitesimal moment, or for a longer time. God alone knows (he added) which of these three possibilities is true; but the first is probable, unless it be contrary to Scripture or to the authority of the Church.

The Franciscan order afterwards adopted zealously this opinion, but maintained as absolutely certain, what Scotus had only ventured to pronounce probable; still, however, with the proviso that it be not contrary to the Catholic faith.

The Dominicans, on the other hand, armed with the authority of St. Bernard and of their famous doctor, St. Thomas Aquinas, combated this doctrine vehemently, as contrary to Scripture and to the tradition of the Church, and therefore contrary to the Catholic faith.

Still the opinion of the Franciscans grew in popular favour. It had an appearance of piety which recommended it to the devout. The University of Paris formally decided in its favour; and the Council of Basle, after much debate, declared it to be a pious opinion, not contrary to Scripture or Catholic faith, and therefore prohibited public teaching or preaching on the other side. Pope Sixtus IV., himself a Franciscan, threw the weight of his authority into the same scale. In 1476 he published a Bull, approving a new office for Festival of the Immaculate Conception, and granting indulgences to those who recited it, or assisted at it. In 1483, he issued another Bull, condemning those who called

the doctrine of the immaculate conception a heresy, and the celebration of the festival of it a sin.

The Dominicans, however, did not consider themselves in any way bound by these Bulls; and the controversy continued to rage as fiercely as ever. The annual recurrence of the Feast of the Conception was a signal for the renewal of the hostilities; and gave birth every year to scenes of the most scandalous kind. But it is remarkable, that neither of the contending parties ever thought of appealing to the supposed infallible tribunal, in whose Divine authority both, nevertheless, professed to believe. They were content to fight and argue as if they had no such unerring judge of controversies; as they dispute, and lost their temper in disputing, just like other men. Is it possible then, to suppose that they really believed themselves to be the disciples of an infallible guide?

At length came the Council of Trent; and when the doctrine of original sin was there to be discussed, the Franciscans contended that an exception should be made in favour of the Blessed Virgin, in the decree which asserted generally that the sin of Adam had passed upon all his posterity. The Dominicans, on the other hand, contended, that no such exception was necessary, because St Paul and the holy Fathers had expressed this doctrine generally, without making any exception in favour of the Virgin. This raised a warm debate on the doctrine of the immaculate conception. The Franciscans maintained that the Church, by celebrating the Festival of the Conception, had sanctioned their doctrine. The Dominicans admitted that the doctrine had, indeed, been tolerated by the Church; but argued that there was no ground, either in Holy Scripture or in sound theology, for exempting the Blessed Virgin from the common infection of our nature.

When the existence of this dispute was made known at Rome, instead of embracing the opportunity of having it finally decided by the infallible authority of the Council, orders were given to the Papal Legates, at Trent, to reconcile the contending parties as far as possible, without giving a triumph to either. The directions were—"Not to meddle with this matter, which might cause a schism amongst Catholics; to endeavour to maintain peace between the opposing parties, and to seek some means of giving them equal satisfaction; above all, to observe strictly the brief of Pope Sixtus IV., which prohibited preachers from taxing the doctrine of the immaculate conception with heresy."

These directions were, no doubt (under the circumstances), eminently wise and prudent; but do they not most clearly show, that the Pope did not believe his own pretence to infallibility, and knew also that his followers did not believe it? Else why not take the present opportunity of settling, by an infallible authority, a controversy which had so long disturbed the church? But to meddle in the matter—that is to say, to decide the question one way or another, might cause a schism amongst Catholics. In other words, these "Catholics," whatever they may pretend, did not really believe in the infallibility of the Pope and council. Else why should they not desire to have the truth infallibly ascertained? and why should there be any danger of a schism, after the infallible judgment was given? No person would surely be mad enough to separate himself from the church, in consequence of a decision which he believed to be infallibly true, and to have emanated from a supernatural and divinely promised guidance. The only mode of accounting for the conduct of the Pope and of the council, on this occasion, is to suppose that neither one nor the other really believed in the pretence to infallibility. Acting, after all, the real test of faith; and here the Pope acts exactly as any prudent, well-advised sovereign would act under similar circumstances—endeavouring to avoid a decision that must irritate one party or the other, and in the meantime seeking to conciliate both parties as much as possible. Although he speaks boldly and loudly before the world of his infallible authority, and of the great blessing of being in a church where there is an infallible tribunal for settling all disputes, yet to "Catholics" he says nothing of all this; on the contrary, he is fully alive to the danger of a schism amongst Catholics, if the infallible tribunal should happen to give an unpalatable decision—in other words, the Pope acts as one who was fully aware that he possessed no infallible tribunal, and as knowing, also, that his "Catholics" believed nothing of the sort, and would run into schism rather than submit to the pretended authority of his infallibility, if it should happen to run counter to their private opinions.

It is impossible to have a clearer proof than this that the Roman communion do not, practically, believe in their own claim to infallibility.

Here, however, we are told that this doctrine of the immaculate conception is not of faith, and therefore the promise of infallible guidance does not extend to the settlement of the question.

But if the boasted gift of infallibility does not enable the Roman Church to settle such a controversy as this,

the advantages of the gift are very much less than its advocates are wont to pretend. If the infallible judge of controversy is unable to decide any controversy, except one in which some vital article of faith is at stake, we are no longer secured in that communion from all error, but only from the extreme error which uproots the faith. All other controversies and errors may exist, and produce in this infallible church the same evil fruits which they have brought forth and do bring forth in other communions.

But here the real question is, whether this doctrine be of faith or not. For they who maintain the immaculate conception maintain it as of faith; whilst they who deny its truth, deny it on the ground of its being inconsistent with an article of faith. Is the infallible tribunal, then, unable to tell its children whether this doctrine is to be believed and received as of faith, or whether it is to be rejected as inconsistent with other articles of faith? For this is the question at issue.

In point of fact, the infallible tribunal has permitted its children to hold inconsistent and opposite views on this subject, and to carry those views out into inconsistent and opposite practice. On the one hand, the advocates of the doctrine (since the twelfth century) have been permitted, and even encouraged, to celebrate an annual festival in honour of the immaculate conception, and to render that doctrine the same reverence in the public service of the church and in their public teaching, as they render to the Incarnation of our blessed Lord himself. What is this but to treat it as an article of faith? And if there were any doubt that it is and must be practically so regarded, that proof would be afforded by the collect in the office for that festival, which was approved by Pope Sixtus IV. In this collect God is addressed, without any doubt or qualification, as having "prepared, by the immaculate conception of the Virgin, an habitation worthy of his Son;" and the faithful are taught to pray to the Almighty, that as God had preserved her from all stain, so by her intercession, he would grant us to come purified into his presence. "Deus, qui per immaculatam Virginis conceptionem dignum Filio tuo habitaculum preparasti, concede, quæsumus, ut sicut ex morte ejusdem Filii tui prævisa, eam ab omni labe præservasti, ita nos quocumque mundos, ejus intercessione, ad te pervenire concedas."

Here the fact of the immaculate conception is pleaded in prayer with the Almighty as an article of faith, without any doubt or hesitation. It is not possible to imagine how faith can be expressed in a more effectual manner than when it is thus pleaded before God in prayer. It is thus that the church, in the collects for the highest festivals of our religion, pleads in prayer to God the doctrines of the Incarnation, the Epiphany, the Circumcision, the Resurrection, the Coming of the Holy Ghost, the Holy Trinity, the Ascension; and it is difficult to conceive in what more solemn way our faith in an article of faith could be evidenced or expressed.

The infallibility of the Roman Church has, therefore, permitted this doctrine of the immaculate conception to be practically made an article of faith in the most solemn offices of religion, whilst, at the same time, it tolerates, in a large and influential body, an absolute denial of the doctrine. Does not this savour greatly of worldly policy, and manifestly show that the authorities in the Church of Rome do not really believe their pretended infallible tribunal to be infallible? The pretence that this doctrine is not *de fide*, will not serve their turn here, because they have practically made it to be *de fide* to a large and increasing body in their communion, by sanctioning and tolerating the Festival and Office of the Immaculate Conception.

And more than this, divines are permitted, without censure, to connect that doctrine with articles of faith in such a way that, if we receive their statements, a belief in the immaculate conception is necessary to the reception of the faith. For example:—"It is impossible to believe," says Bernardinus, of Sienna, "that the Son of God could have consented to be born of the Virgin, or to have taken upon Him her flesh, if that flesh had ever had a taint of original sin." What is this but an assertion that the Incarnation of the Son of God is *incredible*, unless we receive with it the doctrine of the immaculate conception of the Virgin? "It is impossible," says this author, "to believe the Incarnation, unless we believe also the immaculate conception of the Virgin;" and yet this assertion is tolerated without censure in a church which continues to exercise the power of censuring all books, even by those authors who are not of its communion.

One cannot imagine a stronger form in which a doctrine can be declared to be an article of faith, than by asserting that unless it be received, the doctrine of the Incarnation is incredible. The Church of Rome has tolerated and sanctioned this assertion, and yet seeks to escape from the inconvenience of tolerating also an opposite doctrine, by pretending that the immaculate conception is only a pious belief of the church, and not an article of faith.

And accordingly we find that as the strength of the

party who were opposed to this doctrine declined, the voice of the Holy See became more and more strong in its favour. In 1616 Paul V. prohibited all preaching, lectures, or public teaching against the immaculate conception—a decree which was again renewed in 1622 by Gregory XV., who extended the prohibition to books and private conversations, reserving, however, an exception in favour of those to whom the Holy See might give a special commission to oppose this doctrine.*

So that the infallible judge reserves to himself the power of allowing one party in the Church, by a special indulgence, to contravene and refute a doctrine, for which he appoints, at the instance of another party, a special festival with a collect, making it, for those who use that office, an article of faith. He prohibits one party from impugning, even in private conversation, this favoured doctrine, but permits the opposite party to assert and teach openly, that except it be received, the very Incarnation of our Lord is incredible.

All this shows the prudence with which, not only the See of Rome, but the Council of Trent, felt it necessary to act in this matter. The inclination of the heads of the Roman Church has always been to declare this doctrine an article of faith, if they dared to do so, and every day one step after another is made in this direction. A very recent Papal ordinance, directed to the Congregation of Rites, has authorized the introduction of this doctrine into the public service of the church for the festival of the 8th December, amongst the Roman Catholics of Italy, Spain, France, England, Germany, and America, who, it seems, have petitioned to be permitted to add the adjective *immaculata* to the word *conceptione*, in the proper preface for that day. This doctrine is, therefore, now practically an article of faith amongst Romanists, in all these countries, and yet the infallible judge of controversies still prudently holds back, and forbears to pronounce that an article of faith, for the whole church, which he has permitted so large a portion of his followers to embrace as such. In a few years the party opposed to the immaculate conception will probably be extinct, and then, no doubt, we shall find that the prudence of the Holy See, when the fear of causing schism is removed, will take another turn, and a new article of faith will be added to the Tridentine Creed.

All this seems strangely inconsistent with a confident belief in the existence of infallibility. It is the same sort of tortuous and prudent policy that is usually adopted by worldly politicians who have an object to carry, and who fear to give offence to a powerful minority. One party is permitted to go the whole length of celebrating a festival, and introducing their peculiar doctrine as an article of faith into the collect and proper preface for the day. The opposite party are forbidden to preach publicly, or to provoke the hostility of their opponents by troublesome discussions, whether public or private, but receive, nevertheless, a peculiar exemption from the necessity of using any office, or celebrating any festival in which the obnoxious doctrine is assumed.—nay, they receive also a private indulgence, enabling them, in their own schools, to teach the opposite doctrine, and all this avowedly from prudence, lest, if the infallible judge should decide in favour of one party, the other should break out into schism.

It is evident, therefore, that neither the contending parties, nor the court of Rome itself, are believers in their own pretence to the possession of an infallible tribunal.

Rebitem.

Love and Loyalty. By the Author of Irrelagh. London: William Pickering. 1851.

We understand this graceful little poem has had the honour of being presented to Her Majesty, and has been graciously received. The welfare of Ireland is evidently dear to the heart of its author, who thus pleads for Erin—

"Nor let the noble oak that stems the blast
Neglect the graceful vine around it cast,
When timely succour might its health restore,
And bid its drooping branches flourish more.
Remember, is thy glance on trophies won,
Thy conquering Wellington is Erin's son.
Around thy brow is not one laurel band,
But hath some flower transplanted from her land.
Her gallant mariners have died to keep
Thy naval flag victorious o'er the deep.
Her pulpit eloquence hath charmed thine ear;
Her manly sense thy senate paused to hear,
And in sweet interchange of kindness thou
Hast seldom failed, nor wilt thou fail her now.

* "Neque etiam in Sermonibus et scriptis privatis audeant asserere quod eadem beatissima Virgo fuerit concepta cum peccato originali, nec de hac opinione affirmativa aliquo modo agere seu tractare, acceptis lamen quibus a sancta sede apostolica fuerit aliter super his specialiter indultum."—Decret., A. D. 1622.

* F. Paul Sarpi—Hist. Conc. Trid. lib. ii. c. 68.

* "Non enim credendum est quod ipse Filius Dei voluerit nasci ex Virgine, et sumere ejus carnem que esset maculata aliquo originali peccato."—Sermon, 49.