

THE FATHERS AND THE GRANDFATHERS.  
TO THE EDITOR OF THE CATHOLIC LAYMAN.

MR. EDITOR.—The last night we met for discussion, just as we got in, Andy says to the Reader, "Don't be bothering me any more about tradition; for even if we gave it up entirely we'd be as well off as you, for we'd have our Bibles." "That's one way of trying to get out of a difficulty," says the Reader. "But even granting, for argument's sake, that you were rid of tradition, you wouldn't be any better off." "We would," says Andy: "for you couldn't then be badgering us about not being able to produce our rule of faith; all we'd have to do would be to pull out the Douay, and say "There's our rule." "Well," says the Reader, "I would look better. I allow; for a man looks very foolish when he's asked for his rule, and has to allow that he hasn't got it; but, still, you'd be no better off, for though you'd have a Bible you couldn't use it." "How's that?" says Andy. "Because," says the Reader, "your Church tells you that you're not to understand or interpret Scripture except according to the unanimous consent of the fathers." "Thus you see that you may have a Bible in your hand, but it's of no use to you, unless you've got the unanimous consent, too." "Well," said one of the boys, "what's to hinder us getting it? and then we're all right." "There's just this to hinder you," says the Reader; "it's a thing that's not to be found." "What is it at all?" says Jerry; "for I see plainly that it's a very needful thing to have; for the Bible is no use to us without it." "Well," says the Reader, "it's the writings of men that lived near the times of the Apostles, and they must all be agreed about a point or there's no unanimous consent." "And what does our Church say is the use of it?" says Jerry. "To explain the meaning of the Apostles' writings," says the Reader. "And wouldn't their own words explain their meaning better than any other men's words?" says Jerry. "We Protestants think so," says the Reader; "but your Church thinks differently." "Well, then," says Jerry, "the only thing for us is to get their books; for it's quite plain that according to our creed the Bible is no use to us without them." "But," says the Reader, "all you're worth would hardly buy them." "Well," says Andy, "I would be worth our while to club together and get them; for without God's Word our poor souls have no chance, and our Church says that we're not to have the one without the other." "But," says the Reader, "even if you had those books you'd be as far as ever from what you want." "How's that?" says Jerry; "sure if we had them we'd have the writings of the fathers." "You would," says the Reader; "but 'tisn't the writings of the fathers your Church requires, but their unanimous consent." "But," says Jerry, "if we had their writings, sure we'd have their unanimous consent." "Indeed, you wouldn't," says the Reader; "for, instead of being agreed about the meaning of Scripture, they differ with each other on almost every subject. They dispute, for instance, about the meaning of the text 'Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church.' " "Sure," says Andy, "they must all agree that the Church was built on St. Peter." "Indeed they don't," says the Reader. "St. Jerome and half a dozen others are of that opinion; but St. Augustine and half a dozen more say that 'twas built on all the Apostles. Then St. Chrysostom and a dozen fathers at his back hold that 'twas built on the faith that Peter confessed; while Pope Pius II. and Thomas Aquinas and a score of others declare that the Church was built on Christ Himself." "Now," says the Reader, "there's a little touch of the unanimous consent, and it's just the same on every other doctrine. You read one father and he makes all plain to you, but then you open another and he tells you that the other fellow was all wrong, and that no one's right but himself, and then you open a third, and perhaps he doesn't touch on the point at all." "I declare," says Jerry, "it reminds me of what happened long ago in the time of Fin-ma-cool: some ould king got sick and uneasy in himself, but for the life of him he couldn't tell what it was that ailed him. At last a great doctor came to him that lived in them parts, and he saw that 'twas idleness ailed the poor ould gentleman, and that he was fairly blue-moulded for want of something to do; so he says to him, there's only one cure for you in all the prescriptions of the healing art. 'Set off to-morrow,' says he, 'and never stop until you find a happy man, and when you find him strip off his shirt and put it on you warm, and may I never handle another guinea but you'll be cured that very minute.' So the king set off on his travels to look for a happy man; he first searched his own country, but the never a one could he find there, for the ould negur had put down the stills, and put up the gaugers, and there wasn't a drop of the thing you know to be got for love or money. He then went to America, but the females were putting on the breeches there, and talking about the rights of women; so, of course, he couldn't find a happy man. He then went to England, but he found them all grumbling about the taxes and the weather; and no matter how close he looked, the never a one of him could find a happy man. At last he came to poor ould Ireland ('twas in the good times, long ago, when there was no police nor balliffs, nor such like cattle; for St. Patrick had banished them along with the other varmin), and the king met a poor, ragged looking fellow going the road, and

says he, 'Paddy' (and wasn't it cute of him to know that his name was Paddy)—'Paddy,' says he, 'have I any chance of finding a happy man about here?' 'Every chance in life,' says he, 'and you won't have far to go either, for here's myself as happy a fellow as you'll find on Irish ground.' 'Is it happy,' says the king, 'when you haven't a coat on your back.' 'Never mind that,' says he; 'sure the weather is hot, and I'm pleasant and cool,' says Bryan O'Lynn. 'But,' says the king, 'you haven't even a shoe to your foot.' 'Sure,' says Paddy, 'that makes me the lighter for the road, and there's no fear of me getting corns.' 'But,' says the king, 'don't the taxes vex you?' 'The never a bit,' says he; 'for I've no hing to tax.' So the king was in great delight that at long last he had found a happy man, and he gave the wink to his men to lay hold of poor Paddy. 'Now,' says the king, 'strip off his shirt and hand it here.' So, my dear, they made at him like tigers to get the shirt, but they were fairly sold; for the never a bit of a shirt had he on him at all." "Well," says the Reader, "'twas a great sell, I allow; but not greater than sending a man to hunt for the unanimous consent of the fathers. One father cuts up another father, and a third takes a slap at him, and another that looks very like the thing doesn't touch on the subject at all; so that even if you had their writings you'd be as far as ever from their unanimous consent." "Why, then," says Jerry, "what's the use of our Church telling us to look for a thing that can't be found; it's like saying to us, when the sky falls you'll catch larks." "True for you," says the Reader, "and I'm thinking you'll be a long time without a lark if you wait till the sky falls to catch one; and you'll be just as long without reading your Bible if you wait till you get the unanimous consent of the fathers." "If that's the way," says Jerry, "I'll leave the fathers to them that likes them, and I'll stick to the grandfathers." "You'll show your sense," says the Reader; "and you'll find that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John will tell you their own meaning better than any other men can tell it to you." "Well," says Andy, "I've another answer for you. We needn't bother ourselves with the fathers at all; for Keenan tells us that the Church will interpret the Scriptures for us," and Dr. Milner says the same." "Very good," says the Reader; "but now tell us what's the Church; for you must know that before you can ask her any questions." "There's no difficulty about that," says Andy; "for Keenan tells us that a Church consists of pastors and people; or, as the Catechism of the Council of Trent says, 'the faithful (that means good Romans, you know) dispersed throughout the world;'" and Dr. Doyle says the same." "Well," says the Reader, "it's a hard thing that when you want the meaning of a verse you must go to all the faithful throughout the world to get their opinion." "You're wrong altogether," says Andy; "we haven't to do any such thing; for Keenan explains to us that it's the teaching body of the Church, composed of the Pope and bishops, that's to interpret the Scripture." "According to that," says the Reader, "it isn't the Church that's the interpreter, but the clergy." "Sure they're the Church," says Mick. "No," says Andy, "they're only a part of the Church." "Then," says the Reader, "you must admit that Dr. Milner is wrong when he says that the Church is to interpret Scripture; for you see clearly that it's only a part of the Church that's to do it." "Well," says Andy, "I allow that 'twould be plainer to put it in that way; for, as Keenan says, it's only 'God's appointed organs'; that's to explain it." "Why, then," says Mick, "them's the organs that's soon put out of tune if you ask them to explain a text of Scripture." "That strikes off some of the number," says the Reader; "but, still, isn't it a hard thing that you've to go to the Pope and bishops if you want the meaning of a verse?" "You mistake entirely," says Andy. "Dr. Milner explains to us that we needn't bother ourselves about Church or Fathers, or Bishops or Popes, but just go to our priest, and he'll tell us all we want to know." "Then, in point of fact," says the Reader, "the priest is your rule of faith?" "He is," says Andy, "and I'm not ashamed to confess it; for Keenan tells us that 'the teaching body is to the taught an infallible rule of faith,' and the only one of the teaching body we can get at is Father John." "Well," says the Reader, "I've driven you to it at last. I've been a long time waiting for it; but I knew that you'd have to come to it in the end. You've nothing else to trust to for your religion but the priest. Your Church, and your rule of faith, and your infallibility, all dwindle down by degrees until they settle in the parish priest; you have his word for your religion, and nothing more. You first told us that you had a splendid rule of faith (far superior to the Protestant rule), consisting of the Bible and tradition, but when you were asked to produce the traditions the never a one of them could you find. Then you told us what a fine thing it was to have the Bible interpreted by the unanimous consent of the fathers; but, somehow or other, their consent wasn't to be had. Then you told us that 'twas a great thing to have an infallible Church to explain the Bible; but when we asked you how 'twas possible to get at the Church, you told us that the Pope and bishops would do, and when we

asked you how we were to get at the Pope and bishops, you told us, out of Dr. Milner, that the priest would do; so that all you have to show for Bible, and fathers, and tradition, and rule of faith, and Church, and infallibility, is poor old Father John." "I declare," says Jerry, "it reminds me of a trick they played me on the first of April; they sent me to the hotel with a written paper to give to an officer of the horse marines, that they said was just come from India, and on the paper was written (but I didn't know that till after) send the fool farther. So the people there sent me to a third, and so on until I was fairly worn off my legs, and not a bit of the officer did I find at all. So, in like manner, when we want the meaning of a verse of Scripture we're not allowed to examine it ourselves, but we're sent first to the Church, and then to the fathers, and then to the Pope, and then to the bishops, and in the end to Father John. Sure 'twould be just as well to tell us in the beginning that the priest was our Church and rule of faith as to be ending us like fools from one to the other." "True for you," says Mick, "and even if we got it in the end, 'twouldn't be so much matter. But sure we all know that we're just as much in the way of getting the interpretation of a text from the priest as Jerry had of finding the horse marine. Sure it's jumper and souper, and heretic we're called if we ask the meaning of a verse of Scripture. I'll tell you what," says he, "I'll send the fool farther they're playing with us, and it's real fools we are that we don't examine the Bible for ourselves." "You see, at all events," says the Reader, "that after our long discussion about the rule of faith you have to admit that the priest is the only rule you can produce. The traditions can't be come at, and the unanimous consent can't be come at, and the Church can't be come at, and the Pope can't be come at, and the bishops can't be come at, and the Bible can't be interpreted without them; so the only thing you have to show for them all is poor old Father John." "The dear knows, then," says Mick, "he's no great show; but tell us," says he, "what have you to show?" "The same that I showed you the first day," says he; "the inspired Word of God—that's my rule of faith, and your own Bible admits that it can instruct unto salvation." "Our hands aren't tied by having to go look for something that can't be found before we read our Bibles. We Protestants haven't so go hunting after fathers, but we go straight to the grandfathers; thus we're not depending upon man's word (as you are, when you're trusting entirely to Father John), but we've the Word of God, to be 'a lamp to our feet and a light to our paths.' Our Church, instead of telling us not to examine our Bibles, says to us, search them, and read them; the more you examine them, the better pleased we'll be, for we're teaching you nothing but the truth, so we're not afraid to let you prove our words." "That's fair play, any how," says Jerry. "There's no denying it," says Mick. "Now, then, boys," says the Reader, "you've seen my rule of faith, and you know what kind it is; but during this long discussion, have you ever seen your own rule?" "The never a sight did we get of it at all," says they. "Well, now," says he, "I'd leave it to yourselves, as reasonable men, which of the two rules is the best?" "It's plain to me," says Jerry, "that the rule that can be found, and that can be used, is better than the rule that can't be found, and that can't be made use of, and that we're always hearing about, but never seeing." "That's my own notion of it, too," says Mick, "and I'm determined, with the help of God, to read the Bible for myself." "But, after all," says Andy, "even if I gave up about the rule of faith, it wouldn't prove our religion to be wrong; 'twouldn't prove that purgatory, or transubstantiation, or praying to the Virgin were wrong." "That's quite true," says the Reader. "The discussion about the rule of faith is only preparing the way for discussing those other points." "Well, then," says Andy, "I'll tell you what I'll do with you—let us discuss some of the doctrines on their own merits, using the Bible as our rule. I won't bring tradition against you" ("little thanks to him for that," says Jerry, "when he couldn't find it,"), "nor will I bring the fathers against you, ('small praise to him," says Mick "when he couldn't get them"), nor will I be down on you with the Church, or the Pope, or the Bishops ("sure I ought to be obliged to you," says the Reader); "but I'll be at you with the Douay Bible." "I agree to that," says the Reader, "with all my heart. Let us examine the different doctrines by God's Word, and if you find that they agree with that Word, then hold them fast while you've breath in your bodies; but if you find them opposed to the Bible, then give them up, in the name of God. And remember," says the Reader, "that we don't ask you to believe anything on our words. We only say, examine and prove the thing, and, if you find us right, believe us; but if you find us wrong, don't credit us." "That's fair," says Jerry. "Nothing could be fairer." "But, above all, boys," says the Reader, "let us pray to God for His Holy Spirit while reading the Bible. The subjects are the most important that could occupy our minds, for they concern the salvation or destruction of our immortal souls. Let us, then, pray earnestly to God to bless His holy Word to us, and to open our hearts to receive the Scriptures;" and, with that, he bid us good night.—Your humble servant to command,  
DAN CARTHY.

d Chap. iv, sec. 2. e End of Controversy, Let. x. f Chap. vii, sec. 6.  
g Part II, chap. x, question 2.  
h Abridgment of Christian Doctrine, Apostle's Creed, art. ix.  
i Chap. iv, sec. 5. j Chap. vi, sec. 1.  
k End of Controversy, Letter xii. l Chap. vi, sec. 3.

a Creed of Pope Pius IV., art. II. b Matt. xvi, 18.  
c See CATHOLIC LAYMAN, Vol. V., p. 135.