

SOME DOCTRINES THAT ARE NOT UNDERSTOOD BY NON-CATHOLICS.

AMONG the innumerable misrepresentations to which our faith is constantly subjected there are some to which a Catholic clergyman feels a peculiar dislike in explaining from the personal feelings which are aroused in their refutation. When the doctrines of the Holy Eucharist, or the Blessed Virgin, or the sacred relics of our saints, are attacked, and we rise in their defense, we experience within ourselves a pride in the justice of our cause; there is an enthusiasm infused into the soul by the very theme—we hold in our hands the standard of our Blessed Lord Himself and we lovingly fight His battles; we gather strength from the very altar which is blasphemed, and we are reminded of our dignity by the robes we wear. In a word, we are refreshed by the consciousness that they whose cause we defend are our own brethren who look down with love and sympathy upon our poor efforts to remove prejudice and make truth shine forth in all its splendor.

But when the attack is made upon the individual, and not the cause—when the assault is changed from the principles of faith and practice, into the criminations of our sacred ministry and base insinuations against our character; when the ministers of God stand before the world to answer charges of having turned religion into traffic and corrupted the doctrines to secure influence and wealth, they recoil from meeting, even as a calumny, that against which their very natures recoil. Their feelings, as members of society, are so wounded that they often experience great difficulty in exercising the office of meekness and sweet charity in undeceiving the beguiled and in maintaining the truth.

I.

Indulgences ever since the days of Luther have been the fruitful themes of "ridicule, sarcasm and declamation." They have been the pardon for sins, past, present and future. The sale of forgiveness for the grossest crimes has been charged against the Church and her priesthood in the language of invective and unrelenting hostility.

That abuses have existed regarding the practice of Indulgence no one will deny, and that they were made the ground for the dreadful separation of the sixteenth century, must be deeply regretted, for no such abuses could ever justify the schism that ensued. The misrepresentation of this doctrine of the Church, chiefly proceeds from the misapprehension and from the misunderstanding of our real belief. As in my special doctrinal explanations I shall state the doctrine of indulgence in the simplest terms. What then is an indulgence? It is a remission by the Church, in virtue of the Keys of a portion, or the entire, of the temporal punishment due to sin. The infinite merits of Christ form the fund whence this remission is derived; but besides this, the Church holds that the merits of the saints, and the penitential works of the just, are applicable to the other members of Christ's mystical body. Thus, for instance, the sufferings of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the austerities and persecutions of St. John the Baptist, the tortures endured during twenty centuries by the numberless martyrs whose lives had been free from vice and sin, the prolonged penances of holy anchorites,—all these, made valid through their union with the merits of Christ's passion, were not lost, but formed a vast spiritual treasury, applicable to the sanctification of sinners.

Now if the temporal punishment reserved to sin was anciently believed to be remitted through the penitential acts of the sinner,—any other substitute for them—approved by the authority imposing them—must have been considered of equal value, and as acceptable to God. And so it must be to-day. If the Church had the right of exacting such satisfaction as she formerly ex-

acted, she necessarily possesses to-day the same power of substitution with the same efficacy and consequently the same effects. Such a substitution is what we Catholics call an indulgence.

This power is included in the commission given by Christ to His Apostles to forgive or to retain sins. Admit this divine tribunal, and no one will deny that the power committed to the Apostles was enforced in the primitive Church; no one will contend that satisfaction was not exacted in punishment of sin. If the Church in ancient times considered herself competent to enforce severe penances she certainly had the right and power of relaxing the rigor of these inflictions, without lessening their value. Accept this reasoning, and you have sufficient proof that indulgences were in use in the primitive Church as they are at the present time. We may have clearer forms, owing to the scholastic precision of the Middle Ages, but the doctrine as to substance is the same, while the terminology is refined and stripped of the husks of indefinite opinion. Divine Providence raised up the great school men to cast the dogmas of our faith in a new mould, capable of withstanding the attacks of modern times.

We will now enter upon the proofs of this doctrine. The New Testament furnishes us with a clear proof of such power being exercised. In the first Epistle to the Corinthians, St. Paul not only severely reproved, but punished grievously a member of the Church who had fallen into a scandalous sin. These are his words: "I indeed, absent in body, but present in spirit, have already judged, as though I were present, him that hath so done. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, you being gathered together, and my spirit with the power of our Lord Jesus, to deliver such a one to Satan, for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ." (I Cor. V. 3-5). The punishment here inflicted is of a severe character. Whatever it may have been, it certainly was of a remedial nature, intended to reclaim the sinner, and by the punishment of the body, to rescue the soul from eternal damnation. It is not a remission of actual guilt, for the punishment is inflicted by the whole congregation, and sacramental forgiveness has never been considered congregational—or one to be performed by a body of the faithful, nor even by a pastor no matter how dignified—at a distance. Hence we must conclude that a penance of some sort was imposed upon the incestuous Corinthian intended for his amendment and as reparation for the scandal committed before the Church. The consequences of this heavy infraction were such as St. Paul probably foresaw, and such as he desired. The unfortunate sinner was plunged into a grief so excessive as to appear dangerous to his welfare. The sentence is revoked, and St. Paul entreats the congregation to forgive him and comfort him; and adds that he had already confirmed the sentence which they had passed or were going to pass. Evidently the entire action is not a ministerial one, affecting the forgiveness of crime, for that could not be in the hands of the flock.

From all this it is evident that the term of punishment is abridged and the sentence reversed before the completion of the penance, and this, owing to the great sorrow manifested by the penitent, which was considered sufficient for the remaining portion. This is precisely what we call an indulgence.

After this striking proof from Scripture we are not surprised at finding the Church exercising at the earliest times, a similar power. To understand this practice clearly it may be well to say a few words on the subject of canonical penance. From the age of the Apostles it was usual for those who had fallen into grievous offenses to make a public confession of them, and then to subject themselves to a course of public penance, which received the name of canonical, from the canons whereby it was regulated. Such penitents, as we learn from the early Fathers, put on a black, coarse habit, and if men, closely shaved their heads. They presented themselves before the assembly of the faithful on the first day of Lent, when the presiding Bishop or priest placed ashes upon their heads, a custom still preserved in the Catholic Church—whence the name of Ash Wednesday. The term

of this penance was varied according to the grievousness of the offence. It lasted sometimes only forty days; at others seven, thirty or even forty years; for some dreadful crimes its duration was the natural life of the penitent. These were the usual periods allotted to public penance, so that the signification of these terms is, that the indulgence granted is accepted by the Church as a substitute for a penance of that duration; a plenary indulgence being a substitute for the entire term of awarded penitential inflictions. During this period of time every amusement was forbidden. The poor sinners were occupied in prayer, fasting, and good works. They were divided into several classes, and were excluded from divine service, till they performed the prescribed penances. In most cases absolution preceded the giving of the penance—or at least it was granted during the time of its performance.

The Church reserved to itself under all circumstances, the right of mitigating the penalties under various circumstances. Extraordinary sorrow and fervor manifested by the penitent during the performance of his task was always considered a justification for a proportionate relaxation. Thus the Council of Nicea prescribes: "In all cases the disposition and character of repentance must be considered. For they who by fear, by tears, by patience and by good works manifest a sincere conversion.....to these the bishop may show more indulgence, but not to those who manifest indifference and think it enough that they are allowed to enter the Church. These must complete the whole period of penance." St. Basil says in like manner, "that he who has power of binding and loosing can lessen the time of penance to the truly contrite." The Council of Lerida says: "Let it remain in the power of the Bishop either to shorten the separation of the truly contrite, or to separate the negligent a longer time from the Holy Church."

Another motive of relaxation was the approach of a persecution when the penitents would have an opportunity of testifying their sorrow by patient endurance. They were admitted to the Blessed Eucharist and participated in the prayers of the Church. St. Cyprian is very clear on this point: He says, "that since the design of the Holy Eucharist is to give strength to those that receive it—they must not be deprived of its support whom we would guard against the enemy." A similar indulgence was granted to penitents in danger of death, as was decreed by the Council of Carthage. "When a sinner implores to be admitted to penance, let the priest without any distinction of persons enjoin what the canons enact." Whence it appears that the canonical penance was to be continued after the absolution and admission to the Sacrament of Eucharist, and consequently that it was meant for satisfaction after sin was remitted, and likewise that the Church held itself competent to give a mitigation or an indulgence in it. The priest had the power to make this modification. Pope Innocent I. confirms the discipline. St. Augustine gives another ground whereon mitigation of penance was sometimes granted; that is when intercession was made in favor of the repenting sinner by persons of influence with the pastors of the Church. But the chief ground for mitigation or indulgence is to be found in the mediation of the early martyrs in behalf of the condemned Christians who had fallen under the censure of the Church. A recommendation from some servant of God about to receive a martyr's crown always brought about a complete reconciliation—mitigation or absolution from the remainder of the penance. Tertullian, the oldest Latin Father, is the first to mention this practice. After exhorting the confessors of Christ to preserve themselves in a state of grace and communion with the Church, he then continues: "Which peace some, not having in the Church, are accustomed to beg from the martyrs in prison; and therefore ye should possess and cherish and preserve it in you that so ye may perhaps be able to grant it to others." Here Tertullian speaks of the custom and makes it the basis of his exhortation to the martyrs. St. Cyprian in the following century confirms the same practice. He says: "We believe that the merits of the martyrs and the works of

the just can do much with the Just Judge." Therefore it appears that in the ancient Church, relaxation from the rigor of the penitential institutions, was granted in consideration of the friendly interposition of the martyrs of Christ, who seemed to take upon themselves the punishment due the penitents according to the canonical institutions. The practice no doubt led to abuses which St. Cyprian complains of, but the principle he never for a moment calls in question.

There is but one more instance to complete the resemblance between ancient and modern indulgences. What I have thus far given applies chiefly to a diminution of punishment—and not to a commutation, which seems the specific characteristic of indulgences at the present day. But although the abridgment of a punishment and the substitution of a lighter one, are in substance one and the same thing, yet even in this respect we can illustrate our practice from antiquity. The general Council of Ancyra already referred to, expressly sanctions the commutation of public penance in the case of deacons who have fallen, and afterwards stood firm. The Ven. Bede says, that the Church allowed other good works to be substituted for fasting in favor of persons in poor health.

II.

The indulgences of modern times are nothing more than what were granted in the first ages of the Church with this difference; that the public penance is no longer in force, owing to the relaxation of discipline and change of living. It entirely disappeared in the 12th century, but the Church has never given up the desire of restoring the fervor and discipline of the primitive Church, and consequently instead of abolishing these forms and substituting other practices in their place, she has preferred to retain these as mitigations of what she still holds herself entitled to enforce. The only difference therefore between her former and her present practice is that the mitigation of commutation has become the ordinary form of satisfaction which she deems it prudent to exact.

From all this we must conclude that our indulgence, and that of the ancient Church, rest upon common grounds. In the first place, satisfaction has to be made to Almighty God for sin remitted under the authority and regulation of the Church. Secondly, that the Church has always considered herself possessed of the authority to mitigate by diminution or commutation, the penance which she enjoins. Thirdly, the sufferings of the saints, in union with Christ's merits are considered available towards granting this mitigation. Fourthly, that such mitigation, when prudently and justly granted, is conducive towards the spiritual weal and profit of Christians. These considerations enable us to understand the terms employed in granting indulgences. First, as to the periods for which they are usually granted. We use apparently an arbitrary form of forty days, or of seven, thirty, forty years, or plenary. Now these were precisely the periods allotted to public penance so that the signification of these terms is, that the indulgence granted is accepted by the Church as a substitution for a penance of that duration. Then again the phrase, forgiveness of sin, which occurs in the ordinary forms of granting an indulgence applies in the same manner; in ancient times there was a two-fold forgiveness; one sacramental, which generally preceded or interrupted the course of public penance; this was the absolution from the interior guilt in the secret tribunal of penance; the other was the absolution or forgiveness in the face of the Church which took place at the completion of the public penance. Now as we have seen, an indulgence has no reference to the inward guilt—or to the eternal punishment incurred by sin, but only to the temporal punishment and its necessary expiation. When therefore, an indulgence is said to be the forgiveness of sin, the phrase applies only to the outward guilt—or that portion of the evil whereof the ancient penitential canons took cognizance. This is further proven by the practice of the Church which always makes Confession and Communion an indispensable condition for the receiving of an indulgence.

When considered in its origin, it

brings back to our recollection the rigor with which the Church of God visited sin, and how we fall short of that severe judgment which the saints passed on transgressions of the divine law; it acts as a protest on the part of the Church, against the degeneracy of our modern virtue. It animates us to live up to the former spirit of the Church by practicing greater charity, mortification and prayer. It is said by some that the works enjoined for the gaining of an indulgence have been sometimes even irreligious or profane; and that others have had no object but to fill the coffers of the clergy and in modern times are light and frivolous. Such charges proceed from ignorance. They arise from the misunderstanding of the name. In the Middle Ages, Europe saw its princes and emperors, its knights and nobles abandon everything they held dear on earth and devote themselves to the cruel task of war in a distant land to regain the Holy Sepulchre of Christ from the hands of infidels. And what reward did the Church offer? Nothing more than an indulgence. Far from being compatible with vice and sin, to gain this indulgence it required a devotedness of purpose and a purity of motive which show how the Church only bestowed it for the sanctification of her children for the performance of a work which she deemed most honorable and glorious. "Whoever," decrees the famous Council of Clermont, "shall go to Jerusalem to liberate the Church of God, out of pure devotion, and not for the purpose of obtaining honor or money, let the journey be counted in lieu of all penance." It may be said that many took the cross from other motives. Granted; but they did not partake in the spiritual benefits of this indulgence. Men like Godfrey and St. Louis were few in number, like Gideon's host, but like it they conquered in the strength of the Most High. They valued the gifts of the Church beyond all earthly diadems. The Church felt called upon to repress the formidable foe who had snatched from her very bosom a treasure dearly loved and prized by her, and who had exterminated religion in one of her fairest provinces, and even threatened the very heart and centre of Christendom. Well and nobly did she arouse the courage of her children, and arm them with the badge of salvation, and send them forth unto conquest. Who that contemplates the enthusiastic devotion of the crusaders to the cause of religion in the midst of dangers and privations of the most dreadful nature, will venture to say that the gaining of this indulgence, imposed but a light and pleasant task. There are always cold hearts that will measure others' ardor by their own frozen temperament and refer the feelings of distant ages, and of men whose minds were cast in nobler moulds to the conventional codes of modern theories. To such the enthusiasm of the crusader will appear a frenzy, and the soil which was watered by the Saviour's blood, a possession not worth the sacrifice of reconquering. But for us Catholics it is sufficient to know that they who imparted spiritual blessings to the noble warriors who placed the cross upon their shoulders, judged otherwise, and believed it to be an undertaking of great value and glory to every Christian. Such is the charge of indulgences granted for evil and profane purposes. What shall we say of the dreadful charge of avarice that has so multiplied indulgences in modern times? For what other objects were the jubilees instituted, save to fill the coffers of the Sovereign Pontiffs with the contributions of thousands of pilgrims, eager to gain its special indulgences?

Well, I have had the happiness of witnessing one of these lucrative institutions. I was in Rome when our Venerable Pontiff Leo XIII. opened the jubilee, soon to close. I saw the myriads of pilgrims who were flocking to Rome from every land. I noted their tattered raiment and wearied frames. I saw the convents and hospitals filled with them at night, reposing on beds and cots furnished by the charity of the citizens. I saw them at table served by Roman nobles and distinguished ecclesiastics of all grades. Even the Roman Pontiff himself lovingly aids in this good work. I witnessed abundant blessings and tears of gratitude which were poured forth by the pilgrims as they departed,—but of pre-

cious jewels offered by them to shrines—or gold cast into the bosoms of priests, I heard little. But I did hear that the funds of charitable institutions and private individuals would be exhausted and heavy debts incurred by giving hospitality to the pilgrims. Were the charitable undertakings of these institutions and kind-hearted men and women vain and foolish? Or were the pilgrimages pleasure excursions to the Eternal City? Well I wish you could have seen these pious band of pilgrims from every nation and tribe of the world—crowding the churches and holy shrines—filling the squares and public places to hear the word of God. I wish you could have seen the throngs at the confessions and the multitudes that knelt around the altar of God to partake of its Heavenly gift. I wish you could know the good resolutions that were taken at the tomb of the Apostles, the restitutions that were made, and the great wrongs that were righted, and then you would understand why men and women undertake these weary pilgrimages—for most of them were made, not on the majestic Celtic or some other palatial ocean liner, but the toilsome journey was made on foot, and then judge whether it is indulgence in crime and facility to commit sin that is granted and accepted in such an institution.

What I have sketched of the present jubilee may be said of all pilgrimages whether made to Holy Land, Rome, Assisi, Loretto, Padua, Lourdes, or on American soil at Auriesville or St. Ann de Beaupre. The conditions for the gaining the coveted indulgence are the same everywhere. We do not claim that during the Middle Ages and even later that no abuses took place, but the Church ever tried to remedy the evil. These abuses were strongly condemned by Innocent III., in the Council of Lateran, 1139—by Innocent IV., in that of Lyons, in 1245—by Clement V., in the Council of Vienna, 1311. The Council of Trent reformed the abuses which had subsequently crept in and which had been unfortunately used as a pretext for Luther's separation from the Church.

Some one may say why retain a name so often misunderstood and misrepresented. Why not substitute another that has no reference to practices now in desuetude? Well, dear readers, the answer is very simple. We are a people who love antiquity even in words. We are like the ancient Romans who repaired and kept from destruction the cottage of Romulus, though it might appear useless and mean to the stranger that looked upon it. We call the offices of Holy Week, "Tenebrae," because the word reminds us of the times when the night was spent in mournful services before God's altar. We retain the name baptism which means immersion, though the rite is no longer performed in that manner. We cling to names that have their origin in the fervor and glory of the past. These are not easily driven from the recollections which cling even to words, by the taunts and wishes of others who seize upon them to attack and destroy the dogmas which they enshrine. They serve to strengthen our faith. No, dear Catholic and Protestant readers, no other word could so completely express our doctrine as the much abused word "indulgence."

The works of piety and devotion to which indulgences are attached are often ridiculed and belittled. From what good work does an indulgence granted on some festival day hinder us? On the contrary, are not the very conditions a salutary means to the end desired? We Catholics know that without penitent confession and the worthy reception of the Holy Eucharist a plenary indulgence cannot be gained. We know too, that the return of each season, when the Church holds up to us the blessings of an indulgence, is a summons to our conscience to free itself from the burden of its transgressions and return to God by sincere repentance. We know that were not these inducements presented we might run on from month to month in thoughtless neglect of our Christian duties. Let us prepare for those special times of grace and mercy with fervor and sorrow for sin, so that we may always profit by the liberality with which the spouse of Christ unlocks the treasures of His mercies to her faithful children.—Rev. John F. Mullane, in Donahoe's Magazine.

—After a few moments considering that it was charity to console trusting to my guard preserve me from harm that night, before the I went with the old Develin tower, which at the north-west corner enclosure. We had quarters of the musket was terribly afraid of. But Bell steered our way that we escaped. When we got to the C Peter "ad vincula," close to the wall, until had turned, and we he retreating in the opposite. Then we stole on to the tower; the warder was admit us into the door where poor Tichbourne ing on a bundle of straw. "Whom have you been asked my companion, s we entered. "I said I tary."

The man explained t Tower one must have could get; besides he v an old acquaintance. I lantern on my face, and recognized me at once. "words I told him how I he was greatly touched, to my expressions of sympathy in his eyes. Then my hand, and declared to forgive all who had misfortunes upon him Babington; also Salisbury whose intrigues he att connection of their plot a cruel design, his judgment, the Queen, who had the frightful sentence to out with the utmost se also said that he accepted death in expiation of

I laid the paper which brought with me on a w to serve as a table, and fore it, I wrote from his wonderfully beautiful letter poor young wife. In toul he begged her forgiveness for the Catholic cause, a sion for the innocent Scots, his attachment to had brought him to this had to choose between his associates or giving him the hangman, and the la to him the most honorable. That thought must her consolation. The me death would be no disgr so many priests had drun chalice, and thereby cas round the shameful gibbe like many of his noble and a chivalrous cause, the innocent, and the promoti gion; so at least he thou he engaged in the enterpr turned out otherwise; but all good men would look tention, not the result. exhorted her to find true God, and concluded with an eternal reunion hereaf I read over to him wh written, and he attempte it. An illegible scrawl w he could achieve. "Mr. with his rack is a bad w ter," he said, as he hande the pen with a sorrowful the begged me to write d verses that he had comp he was sentenced. They melancholy, and show how cost him to give up his l liked them so much that I might keep a copy of t ward for my services as sis. He consented willi asked me to pray for him of execution, and afterwar repose of his soul. The are the verses he dictated

My prime of youth is but
care;
My feast of joy is but a
pain;
My crop of corn is but a
tear;
And all my goods is but
of gain;
The day is fled, and yet I
am;
And now I live, and now
done!

My spring is past, and ye
not sprung;
The fruit is dead, and
leaves are green;
My youth is past, and ye