

CATHOLIC EVOLUTION.

"A Reader" sends us a few more questions to solve. One refers to the "advanced" books of the day—rather is it a request for an opinion regarding such works. We have commenced a series of editorials on the use of books at the request of a great number of our readers, especially those interested in reading circles. Last week we referred to three or four of the standard novelists, and we purpose, from time to time, during the winter, continuing these little studies, which will naturally bring us down to what our correspondent wants. It must, however, be remembered that, when an editor has a large number of subjects to treat each week, and many of these subjects require hours of research in order that the articles—no matter how hurriedly written—be in accord with Catholic truth and the teachings of the Church, when the least slip, or mistake, is certain to bring down a severe criticism, and when all this must be done, week in and week out, without other preparation than that which can be snatched from days and nights employed in the less important but equally necessary routine connected with the preparation of suitable material for each issue, it becomes physically impossible to reply to and satisfy all the inquiries made and problems set down for his solution. Moreover, one would need to be a walking encyclopaedia, or else be endowed with a supernatural memory, to quote authorities that men, whose whole time is at their command, who have libraries at their disposal, are unable to cite unless they are granted sufficient leisure to ransack the volumes that they once read. We make these remarks in order that our numerous inquiring correspondents may understand that if their questions—on religion, (dogma or moral), history, Sacred Scriptures, and we know not what—are not answered in the very next issue, it is either because the editor has not had time to study them carefully enough, or else that there are so many other subjects of more immediate consequence to the readers that space forbids the replies being given.

After this long preface, we come to the second question that "A Reader" places before us. It appears that some person styling himself a "Christian Irishman" has discovered that "the present state of the Roman Catholic Church is the result of an Evolution." He arrives at this conclusion on the supposition that the "Church's claim to being always the same since its establishment by Peter (?)"—which he questions—is false. To prove this fallacy he goes through a list of the dogmas promulgated, from the "Invocation of Saints" in the year 375, down to the "Immaculate Conception," in 1854, and the "Papal Infallibility," in 1870. We are asked to verify the dates given for the promulgation of each of the many dogmas mentioned. As far as we can learn at present, the dates are correct enough—sufficiently so, at all events, for all practical purposes. The three we have mentioned are certainly exact.

Here we have two questions raised; the first concerns the establishment of the Church, and the second deals with what is called by this "Christian Irishman" the result of an evolution in the teachings of the Church. With the first we will deal briefly, because to enter into the long since established fact of St. Peter being the first Vicar of Christ on earth, would necessitate a small volume, instead of a column. St. Peter did not establish the Church; it was Christ who established it on Peter. "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I shall build My Church," and He added what is tantamount to this—"the gates of Hell, and

the evolutionists, and the innovators of every nonsensical theory will never prevail against this establishment." And the experience of nineteen centuries is there to show that Christ was right, that the rock upon which He established His Church was immutable, and that the Church has been from the beginning the same through all ages.

This brings us to the question of the promulgation of the dogmas. We do not purpose entering into a labyrinth of details—the whole matter is settled by the assertion of one fact. What applies to a dogma promulgated in the fourth century, equally applies to every other dogma promulgated in succeeding centuries, and to all those that shall be promulgated whenever it is deemed necessary, unto the end of time. Christ established His Church on St. Peter; He gave to His first vicar all powers that he should transmit them throughout the ages of his successors. Having established that Church, Christ promised to remain with it—not as He was seen during the three and thirty years of His life on earth, but in an invisible manner. He also sent the Holy Ghost to sanctify the Church. Having done all this Christ left His Church perfect in every detail, and gave to it all the requisites to meet the different requirements of the future. He did not write down a list of dogmas and leave the same to St. Peter as God the Father wrote the decalogue and gave it to Moses. But He gave to Peter, and, therefore, to his successors, the power to promulgate, whenever the changes in the world demanded it, any of the truths of His religion. Christ saw down the centuries, and from Calvary he beheld each move in the ages that would mark human mutations unto the end of time. He did not establish His Church for the life-time of St. Peter, nor for a century, but for all time.

Every dogma of the Church that has been mentioned in the list that our "Christian Irishman" drew up, existed from the very dawn of Christianity. Why then was such or such a dogma not pronounced upon until centuries after the Ascension? Because the times and circumstances did not require that such promulgation should take place. There are to-day hundreds of dogmas that are not promulgated, but which exist all the same, and which, when the time comes that it will be considered necessary to proclaim them, shall be sent forth to the world with the seal of Christ's Vicar upon them. Mark this distinction. It is not the promulgation that creates the dogma; it is the existence of the dogma that gives rise to the promulgation. Take any one as an example. Let us say Papal Infallibility.

That truth existed from the moment that Christ told St. Peter—in giving him all power—that He would be with him, and that Spirit of Truth—the Holy Ghost—would be with him, and consequently with his successors. Had that truth, that principle, that logical fact not existed before 1870, there would be no need of promulgating it as a dogma of the Church. In fact, if it were not a dogma there could be no promulgation. It is not possible to pronounce upon that which exists not. Why then promulgate it in 1870? Why was it not promulgated in 1780, or in any other year since the first century? Because it was a teaching of the Church that heretofore had been believed and without any serious question. But the time had come when men, following in the footsteps of the heretics and schismatics, began to question this truth. The moment it was placed in doubt, it became necessary to collect together all the evidences of the past—the words of Christ, the sayings of Holy Writ, the teachings of the Fathers, the

philosophical and logical arguments of the masters of reasoning—and to have such evidences sifted to the bottom, to give full opportunity to each one, who formed part of the Church's Council, to bring forward all arguments for or against, and finally, under the guidance of the Holy Ghost, to tell to the world whether or not the principle believed in since the beginning were really a dogma of the Church or otherwise. Having come to the conclusion that the men who questioned that truth were wrong, it became the duty of Christ's Vicar to proclaim their error and promulgate the dogma. The promulgation, therefore, presupposes the dogma; but the dogma never presupposes the promulgation. There is many a principle of law that the courts have never pronounced upon. Yet the law exists all the same. And whenever a tribunal shall pronounce upon any such pre-existing principle, it is not the judgment that creates the law, but the law that gives rise to the judgment. The Church is the same to-day as in the days of Christ—unchangeable, immortal.

THE GREATEST POET.

"Harold James" asks us, "whom do you consider to be the greatest poet?" Friend, you ask a question that would require many, many essays in order to give a reply. Considering our limited space, we will answer as shortly as we can. In the first place you must consider the age in which the poet wrote, the style of his poetry, and the different and ever varied opinions of readers and students. Along the centuries great names appear: Homer, Virgil, Tasso, Corneille, Racine, Milton, Shakespeare and a host of others. But which is the greatest! Oh! there is the question! or is any of them the greatest is another question.

We must know if you refer to the poets of any particular age; and if so, do you refer to the epic, the dramatic, the lyric, or the general poets? Take a school-girl who is in raptures over Tennyson, Longfellow or some other poet; she may not be able to read and appreciate ten lines of Shakespeare, unless she sees his production on the stage. Take the admirer of Racine, in his religious dramas, or Beranger in his songs; he may feel like a person dizzy on a precipice, and be unable to read "Paradise Lost," without a feeling akin to Satan in his fall. As well ask us who was the greatest orator, painter, or musician?

Each has his own style and each his particular merits. While Homer was the first great epic poet, yet Virgil surpassed him in many ways; but Virgil had the advantage of his predecessor as a model. Milton surpassed both in certain details; still Milton had the centuries of example to go by, that were not at the disposal of the others. Shakespeare was a genius; his works are glorious forms of true poetry; but they were written to be acted, not merely read. What Milton did in the way of placing the scene—in most majestic language—before his readers, Shakespeare supplied by the *mise en scene* of his dramas, by the theatrical embellishments which serve to bring out the ideas of the poet. If we were asked, "Who is the greatest Epic poet?" we would have to enter into a series of studies consisting of distinctions, qualifications and comparisons as well as contrast. The same were we asked, "who is the greatest Dramatic poet?" For, while Shakespeare is considered the loftiest dramatic genius the world ever produced, still he had imperfections that are not to be found in Racine or Corneille, while these latter lack a thousand of the perfections that their English rival possessed. The same

study would be necessary were we asked "who is the greatest Lyric poet?" or the greatest English, or American, or European bard. In fact such a question cannot be readily answered.

We must consider the reader; what that reader's standard of poetry is; what style he, or she, most admires; what peculiarities are in accord with his or her taste. In a word, the question could only be answered by the production of a volume, or a series of volumes on literature. However, we are very thankful to our correspondent for his difficult but suggestive question. We will make it our business to take up this subject, and for the benefit of our many literary inclined readers we will go into a study of the respective merits of the best known poets. We may here add that by poetry we do not mean jingling verse. There is many a so-called poem, written in meter, that is so prosaic that no human being could derive any inspiration from it. Poetry must elevate, expand, glorify; or else it must soothe, touch and awaken feelings of a tender or heroic kind. Ruskin has written pages of prose, that compared with some of the poetry of our age, is sublime in the extreme. His writings breathe true poetry, although not couched in the form of verse, while many of the verse of to-day are as poetic as the North Pole and as little calculated to stir up the warmth of sentiment as would be that imaginary prodding-stick of the Arctic regions.

But before closing our reference to this subject we feel that we can answer the question asked in a clear and precise manner. We are required to state "who is the greatest poet?" that is to say, the one who displayed the greatest amount of true poetry and left to the ages the blessed inheritance of his immortal gifts. That one must be the poetic producer of a work, that, like the *chef-d'œuvre* of the Grecian artist, combined the beauty of every model and the perfection of every master. We can emphatically state that such a poet existed: such a bard has sung; such a master has wielded the power of inspired muses for the benefit of mankind and the glory of God. The greatest poet that ever existed is Christ! In the epic majesty of His conceptions, in the descriptive perfection of His delineations, in the miraculous insight into human nature displayed in His sayings, in the lyric beauty, tenderest love and sentiment of His expressions, in His every precept and His every word there are the traces of the truest, the grandest, the noblest, the most touching poetry that the ages ever knew.

And if the building up of a stately epic is the test of greatness in the poet, surely He surpasses all that have ever appeared on earth—be they inspired or otherwise. Look back over nineteen centuries and behold the epic of the world in the stupendous poem left by Christ to the future generations. On the summit of calvary, "with a nail through His hand for a pen, and crimson blood for ink," on the pages of human history the Son of God wrote canto after canto, book after book, the miraculous poem of Catholicity, of the Catholic Church. Study that great poem, and in its presence all others sink into insignificance. If they do possess any light, it is that of the stars, borrowed from the central sun of all glorious thought. Yes; Christ alone can be called the "greatest poet of the world."

We should do by our cunning as we do by our courage—always have it ready to defend ourselves, never to offend others.—Greville.

Not one immoral, one corrupted thought, one line, which, dying, he could wish to blot.—Lord Lytton.