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Catholic Record.

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THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION.

The feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin, which occurs on the 8th day of the present month, December, was instituted as a feast of obligation in commemoration of the solemn decree of the late Pope Pius IX., whereby it was declared as a dogma of faith that the Blessed Virgin Mary was conceived without any stain of original sin. The words of this decree, which was promulgated on the 8th of December, 1854, are the following:

"We define that the doctrine which holds that the most Blessed Virgin Mary was preserved free from every stain of original sin in the first instant of her conception, by a special grace and privilege of Almighty God, by the force of the merits of Jesus Christ the Saviour of the human race, is revealed by God, and must therefore be believed firmly and constantly by all the faithful."

It will be remarked from the words of this decree that so far from its being claimed that the doctrine is a new one, it is positively stated to be revealed by God. It has, therefore, been handed down in the Church from the days of the Apostles, and has been constantly believed, though it was not formally declared by positive decree to be a doctrine, until the date we have mentioned.

The antiquity of the feast of the Conception of the Blessed Virgin is certainly very great, and if it had not been so it is not likely that the modern Church of England, when it was established, while sweeping away so many doctrines of the Church, and while even denying to Mary, the Mother of God, and to saints, God's special friends and servants, that respect and reverence which the Catholic Church has always shown towards them, would have retained in its Calendar this feast, which is to be found in the Book of Common Prayer opposite the date 8th Dec., the day on which Catholics observe the feast.

It is to be remarked that the Church does not, as a rule, observe as feasts the birthdays of the saints, but the days of their deaths, when in the odor of sanctity they departed this life to go to heaven. The days of the birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary and of St. John the Baptist are the only exceptions to this rule, for the reason that the Blessed Virgin was without sin from the beginning, that is, from the moment of her conception, and it is a universal belief that St. John the Baptist was freed from original sin before his birth by a special privilege from God, and therefore his sinless birth can be suitably celebrated by a festival. This analogy applied to the case of the Blessed Virgin proves that the Church, in establishing the feast of her Conception, always believed that her conception was immaculate, though it was not till a later period that the feast was actually named the "Immaculate Conception." The term "Immaculate" was applied to it by Sixtus IV. in 1476, but it was kept as the feast of the Conception in the East certainly about the year 406 and the works of St. Andrew of Crete, written about the year 500, mentions it as a festival of long standing. It is also found as a festival in the Armenian and Ethiopic Calendars, thus proving that it was observed, when these Calendars were composed, long before the great schism of the East.

The decree of the Council of Trent regarding original sin, expressly declares that "It is not the intention of the Holy Council to include in this decree on Original Sin, the Blessed and Immaculate Virgin Mary, Mother of God, but renews the constitutions of Pope Sixtus IV., of happy memory, and declares that they are to be observed under the penalties contained in those constitutions."

It is evident from this that the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception is no new doctrine in the Catholic Church. It is based upon several passages of Holy Scripture which have been constantly interpreted by the Church and by the early Fathers as signifying that the Blessed Virgin was conceived without any stain of sin.

The first of these passages is found in Genesis iii., 15. After the fall of our first parents into the sin of disobedience to God's command, God cursed the ser-

pent, or rather the devil who had assumed the form of a serpent, and at the same time promised a Redeemer whom He couples intimately with a woman, whom the Fathers of the Church have always interpreted to mean the Blessed Virgin. God then says: "I will put enmities between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed; she shall crush thy head, and thou shalt lie in wait for her heel."

These words declare that the enmity between the woman here referred to and the devil shall be identical with the enmity which shall exist between the devil and the seed of woman, which is Christ. It cannot be denied that the enmity between Christ and the devil excludes perpetually all compact and friendship between them, and in the case of the Blessed Virgin the same truth must be held. There is this difference between the two cases, that Christ's triumph over the devil is effected by His own power and merits, whereas the triumph of Mary is not effected by her own power, but by that of her Son; nevertheless in both cases the triumph must be complete and perpetual that the serpent's head may be crushed.

The next passage to which we may refer is the manner of salutation which the Angel Gabriel makes to the Blessed Virgin when announcing to her that she is to be Mother of the Incarnate God, (St. Luke i., 28-32.) The Angel said to Mary: "Hail full of grace; the Lord is with thee: Blessed art thou among women. . . . Fear not Mary, for thou hast found grace with God: Behold thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and shalt bring forth a Son, and thou shalt call His name Jesus; He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High. . . . And therefore also the Holy which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God."

So also St. Elizabeth, filled with the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, addressed Mary: "Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb." (v. 42.)

This expression "Blessed among women," employed by both the Angel and St. Elizabeth signifies in the Hebrew idiom "Most Blessed or most holy of all women." And this of itself would imply her Immaculate Conception, which alone would make her holy above what Eve was before the fall. But the title given to Mary by the Angel deserves peculiar attention: "Full of grace." The perfect participle passive of the verb which signifies the possession of grace is here used: *kharitoman*, which means in reality, "formed in grace;" and Origen so understood it. Origen says in his 6th Homily on St. Luke: "I cannot find this term elsewhere in the Holy Scriptures. This salutation is not addressed to any other human being; but is reserved to Mary alone." So also St. Ambrose, Bishop of Icomium in the 4th century, said: "God formed the Holy Virgin without stain and without sin."

The liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, which is of still earlier date, says that Mary is "in every respect without sin." (*omni parte inculpata*) St. Proclus, the successor of St. John Chrysostom, says that "Mary was formed of pure material," and in the sermons which are attributed either to this same saint or to St. Gregory, the doctrine of the constant purity of the Blessed Virgin is positively taught.

St. Augustine, also, in his book of Nature and Grace, written against the Pelagians, while maintaining the existence of original sin, expressly states that the Blessed Virgin Mary is exempt from the general decree. It will be seen from these considerations and testimonies that the decree of Pope Pius IX., pronouncing this doctrine to be of faith was merely a solemn declaration of what was accepted and believed by the Church from the very beginning.

This prerogative of the Blessed Virgin was most fittingly bestowed upon her by her Divine Son in testimony of His perpetual love for Mary as His future mother, and it was bestowed upon her as a prerogative necessary in order to secure that Christ Himself coming into the world should obtain from His mother a body free from every stain of guilt.

As Holy Scripture tells us that the prayer of the just man is powerful with God, how powerful must be the prayers of Mary in heaven, as she was never stained, even with original sin. This prerogative of the Mother of God should give us confidence in approaching her with the petition: Mary conceived without sin, pray for us.

From the tyranny with which aspirations for true freedom are repressed in the autocratic atmosphere of Russia, it were only to be expected that the result should be a succession of dangerous and determined plots against the ruler who is responsible for all. There are still nihilist plots constantly cropping out, and three persons, two men and a woman, were condemned a few days to execution for having dynamite bombs in their possession. The men are Sidorofsky and Frieifeld, the woman is Sophie Gengberg. Some others who were suspected as accomplices were acquitted.

MISSIONS, CATHOLIC AND PROTESTANT.

From time to time we read in the papers glowing accounts of success of Protestant missions in China, Japan, India and throughout Africa; and there is no doubt that of late years much greater efforts have been made for establishing Protestantism among the heathens than at any former period.

At a meeting of the American Board of Foreign Missions, recently held at Minneapolis, a paper was read by Rev. Dr. Jackson Smith, in which the prospects of these Protestant missions are set forth as being so bright that they must become dominant in the near future; and in commenting on these statements the *Christian Guardian*, in a recent issue, says: "The Catholic power—France, Italy and Spain, although they had priority in the establishment of missions in foreign countries, have fallen behind in this work, and they must forever yield precedence to the nations who have the purest religion and the best means of establishing it among the heathen. This is a sign of the times which is full of the brightest meaning and encouragement."

Mr. Smith and the *Guardian* flatter themselves that as the three Protestant nations—England, Germany and the United States—are now opening up and controlling the principal highways of commerce in Africa and as the power of England is growing in Asia, the people will become accessible only to the gospel as Protestants understand it. They seem to forget that even here in America, where the great majority of the people have undoubtedly sprung from Protestant ancestors, Protestantism is losing its hold upon the population. How is it to be expected that a system which, owing to its confusion of sects, more than the confusion of Babel, is disintegrating here in a civilized country, can propagate the gospel, and overcome Buddhism, Mahometanism and Judaism in foreign countries?

In Maine and Vermont the descendants of the Puritan fathers, who were certainly very religious in their way, are rapidly passing into a state of total indifference to religion, so that it is a common thing to see churches now closed which a few years ago were attended by large and zealous congregations.

One of the most thoroughly Protestant, and indeed we may say the most thoroughly Protestant and anti-Catholic sections of the United States, is that part of Ohio which is called the Western Reserve. It was settled by Presbyterians, Methodists and Congregationalists, the descendants of the Puritans of England, but it is now overrun with Spiritualists, Universalists, Atheists and blasphemers of the worst type. Fifty years ago there were many churches which were well attended and sustained, but now there are only a few feeble churches which are struggling against hope to keep up some appearance of vitality. A clergyman who visited the locality not very long ago published a letter in the *Hartford Religious Herald*, in which he stated that he saw in many places Congregational churches of whole districts left without a single pastor, while on Sunday the people were ploughing, cutting and drawing their hay and grain just as they would on any other day of the week. He added:

"It makes my heart ache to see and say these things, but they are true. I have seen them."

A similar tale may be told of many other districts of the United States where Protestantism of the so-called Evangelical type was not long ago in flourishing condition. There is plenty of room for the missionary work of converting the heathens at our own doors, and it is well worth considering whether the missionary societies, which are becoming so numerous, would not be better occupied in sustaining missionaries in these localities than in sending them to China, India and Central Africa.

It is a very plausible statement which the *Guardian* makes that the English speaking population of the world, which now amounts to about one hundred million, must succeed in propagating Protestantism to a more than proportionate extent, but it must be remembered that about twenty millions of this population are Catholics, who take part in aiding to propagate the Catholic faith. The remaining eighty millions are not by any means all zealous and orthodox Protestants. When Mormons, Atheists, Universalists, and others who may be considered to be not Christians at all, are deducted, these being very numerous, especially in the United States, the number will be very considerably reduced.

But is it true that the Protestant missions have taken the lead, leaving the Catholic missionaries in the background? In Japan, we are aware, Protestantism has made considerable progress, but the number of Protestants in that empire is after all not more than about fifteen thousand, whereas the Catholics number about thirty-eight thousand, and they are rapidly increasing both in number and influence. No fewer than ten Japanese Catholics have been elected to the newly-constituted Parliament of the empire.

In China, the Protestant Episcopal

Church of America has several missions, but their American organ, the *Living Church*, some months ago published from Rev. S. C. Partridge a startling letter, in which it is stated that the divisions of the Protestant sects, and "Rumpshells," are found to be an insuperable bar to the success of the Episcopal missions in that field. There are even two rival and warring camps of missionaries of the Episcopal Church, the Evangelicals and the Ritualists, and these not only work against the missions of other Protestant sects, but in the very presence of the heathens, they are at war with each other. Bishop Boone, we are told, is under instructions from the mission board to dismiss any missionaries of his own Church who will not work for that party in the Church which has an accidental majority on the board, and Mr. Partridge further tells us that the Presbyterian missionaries of the Corea complain that Catholics are working there so secretly that unless "the Protestants make haste, we shall have the task of converting a Roman Catholic country instead of a heathen one."

The *Guardian* derives great consolation from the fact that East Africa is chiefly under the control of three great Protestant powers. Yet it is only a few months since Lieutenant Wisman stated that the Catholic missions of that district are more extensive and more fruitful than those established by the Protestant sects, while in the interior, the king of Uganda has become a Catholic and the majority of his subjects are Catholics also, though the Protestant missionary, Dr. Livingstone, was the first white man who penetrated thither.

The Catholic Church, in fact, is the only one which has missionary vigor. A much larger amount of money is contributed by Protestants for these missionary purposes than by Catholics, but the Catholic missionary religious orders have more zeal and more success than Protestant workers on the same ground, and they do more real work with a much smaller amount of money.

In Nigritia and through the Sudan, Father Combani and several other priests commenced their labors in 1857. Father Combani was afterwards consecrated Bishop and was in 1872 appointed Vicar Apostolic of Central Africa. He founded two establishments at Cairo as a base of operations for his work in the Sudan, and opened a mission house at Khartoum, which afterwards General Gordon made use of as his headquarters. Monsignor Combani soon afterwards was able to establish a colony of converted negroes at Malbes which was self-supporting, and after a time stations were also established at Kordofan, Jebel Nuba and Senhar, in all of which places there are now flourishing Christian congregations. Mgr. Combani is succeeded by Vicar Apostolic Francis Segara.

In Calcutta there were 8,000 Catholics in 1859 out of a population of 800,000 souls. The number of Catholics in that city now is about 50,000. The Jesuits have a college at Calcutta, and another at Dargelling. They have twenty-one stations in the diocese, and whole villages are often admitted into the Church. At Turpa there were 15,000 conversions in a little more than one year.

From Syria there are reports of great successes of the Franciscan Fathers. In Patagonia, in proportion to the population of the country, the success of the Salesian Fathers is equally wonderful, no fewer than 1,300 conversions being reported during the first two months during which they labored there.

Facts like these scarcely justify the statement of the *Guardian* that the Catholic missions are falling before the "pure religion" of Protestantism.

THE WISCONSIN SCHOOL ISSUE.

"Our American exchanges are sharply commenting upon the Roman and Lutheran victory in Wisconsin in the recent elections. The *Western Advocate* calls it 'The Cloud in the North-West.' In this election, the Roman Catholics and the Lutherans combined against the Public schools, and the Democratic party yielded to the temptation of their support by pledging itself, if successful, to favor separate schools for these two bodies. The Lutherans, disliking the present law, according to which the English language must be taught, made common cause with the Roman Catholics, who had still stronger dislike of the whole system of what they term 'Godless schools.' The dominant tone of the press, so far as we have observed, is one of resolute determination to meet the foe and vanquish him—that is, never to allow Rome to lay a blighting hand on the free Public schools of the United States."—*Christian Guardian*, 26th Nov.

When will the Protestant religious press begin to state candidly and fairly the Catholic position on the school question? The extract given above represents that the Catholics of the United States, and especially those of Wisconsin, are plotting for the overthrow of the Public school system, and that in the last-mentioned State the Lutherans joined the Catholics in their onslaught and influence. No fewer than ten Japanese Catholics have been elected to the newly-constituted Parliament of the empire.

We have so frequently pointed out the true position which Catholics take, that it becomes tedious to refer to it again; but it is made necessary to do so from time to time, by the fact that our posi-

tion on the subject is so frequently misrepresented, as is done in the above extract. The Catholics, either in the United States or Ontario, have no intention or desire to destroy the Public school system. As long as Protestants prefer godless, or such schools as have a minimum of religious teaching, by all means let them have them. We do not wish to interfere with their liberty in the least, though we are of opinion that they have not acted wisely in thoroughly secularizing their favorite school system. Are they not themselves rapidly coming round to this view? Have not the Presbyterians and twenty-two other Protestant bodies in New York and New Jersey solemnly recorded their conviction within the last few days that more religion should be introduced into the programme of school studies? Have they not thereby fully acknowledged that the Catholic advocacy of religion in the school room is founded on the strictest principles of parental rights?

Catholics do not attack the Public schools, but we demand in fair play that we shall be accorded the same liberty to give our children a religious education, which we are willing to accord to our Protestant brethren, leaving them free to teach religion or not as they deem proper. The Catholics of the United States have been contributing long enough towards the education of infidels, and of Protestants who desire to impart a minimum of religious instruction to their children, and they have scarcely even complained of the injustice done to them by leaving to themselves the burden of teaching their own children at their own expense.

But the situation in Wisconsin meditates inflicting additional injustice on them, and it is this which has caused them to assert their rights as freemen and citizens. The Wisconsin Legislature was not content with forcing Catholics to pay for two distinct school systems, but it takes measures to put it in the power of the hostile School Boards to suppress the Catholic schools, under pretence of supervising them. This tyranny has been very properly resisted at the polls, and the popular vote has resulted in a grand victory for freedom of education.

It is not to be doubted that, as the *Guardian* says, the press, that is to say that portion of the press which is dominated by fanaticism, will foam and fret because they cannot repress Catholicism, but Catholics have the right to resist oppression, and we are glad to see that they have done so, in this instance, with success. We would be glad to witness that the victory were even more complete than it has been, placing Catholic schools on the same footing as the Public schools. This would be the only fair solution of the school question in the United States, and there would be no injury or injustice to Protestants in the case. But since this cannot be at present, we heartily congratulate our Catholic brethren of the West that they have secured even partial justice by taking decisive steps for the repeal of the odious Bennett Law.

As regards the stand taken by the Lutherans, we need not say so much. The Catholics have little to do with the question which was uppermost in the minds of the Lutherans—the question of German teaching. All the Catholic schools of the State teach English. The Lutherans, however, wish the liberty of having German schools. There may be two opinions on the desirability of this, though we confess we believe that the community so largely German should be treated with the greatest consideration possible in regard to their native tongue. At all events, it is by the combinations and compromises of different shades of opinion that political issues are decided, and if Catholics and Lutherans were able to sink their differences in order to gain a degree of liberty which both desired they had a perfect right to do so.

It is further to be remarked that it was not the Catholics who deserted their party to gain their object in the Wisconsin elections, but the Lutherans. The Catholics were, for the most part, Democrats all along, whereas the Lutherans were Republicans. It is always the policy which anti-Catholic journals adopt to throw all the blame on the Pope, just as the *Guardian* does, if Catholics are connected with the matter in the most remote degree. Why not throw the blame on Kasier William, or Martin Luther, on the present occasion, if there be any one deserving of censure?

By the way: why does our contemporary persist in calling Catholics by the nickname, "Romanish"? To say the least, this is a breach of good breeding and even the laws of the country concede to us the right to be called "Roman Catholics."

The Irish envoys are still meeting with extraordinary success in the prosecution of their mission. Everywhere they are greeted by enthusiastic audiences and large contributions are given freely to aid the cause of Ireland. At each of the meetings held in Worcester and Lowell, Mass., and Manchester, N. H., over \$800 were subscribed, and at Providence, Rhode Island, over \$500. It is expected that America will contribute at least \$500,000, of which amount \$125,000 have been received already.

THE NATIONALIST LEADER-SHIP.

Mr. Parnell's manifesto to the Irish people, to which reference is made elsewhere in these columns, makes complete the breach between himself and the Liberal party of England. He accuses Mr. Gladstone of desiring to minimize the influence of the Irish people before the adoption of such measures as will give Ireland self government, and even when self government shall have been given Mr. Parnell states that the Liberal party proposed still to retain much control for the Imperial Government in Irish local matters, particularly in the administration of justice and in the control of the Irish police force. Very justly Mr. Parnell demands that the future Irish Government shall have full control of all local matters, including the administration of the law, and on this ground, and on the ground of the entire independence of the Irish party from all entanglements with any English party, whether Liberal or Conservative, he appeals to the people of Ireland to sustain him in the present crisis, not only against Mr. Gladstone and Mr. Morley, but also against his own colleagues of the Irish Parliamentary party.

Mr. Parnell more than hints that his colleagues are in league to betray him and to sacrifice him on demand of the English Liberals.

When we reflect upon the services which Mr. Parnell has rendered to Ireland during the period of his leadership of the Irish party, it certainly has an *a priori* appearance of ingratitude to abandon him in the hour of his greatest trial. Yet at this moment it would appear that the large majority of the party have come to the conclusion that they can no longer work under his leadership—and it is not through the fault of the party that this state of affairs has been reached. Mr. Parnell, in his manifesto, boldly accuses the other Irish leaders of conspiring with the Liberal leaders to sacrifice the aspirations of Ireland to the demands of an English party, which he assumes to be hostile to Ireland and to himself.

On the other hand, we find that the most trusted representatives of Ireland, those who have suffered most in Balfour's prisons on account of their patriotism, are with the majority in declaring that Mr. Parnell is no longer possible as their leader. It will not be readily believed that Messrs. Sexton, Davitt, Sweeney, Kilbride, Condon, and Roach, who have suffered for Ireland, have conspired with Ireland's enemies, yet these gentlemen, it is reported, have all decided against Mr. Parnell; and in this they are in agreement with Sir Thomas Emond, Justin M. Carthy, and all the delegates who are now in America, with the exception of Mr. Harrington. Mr. Harrington, too, is simply undecided, if the despatches be correct. He said that his heart is with Mr. Parnell, but that his judgment is against him on this occasion.

The difficulties which surround the Irish Parliamentary party, as seen in Tuesday's telegrams, are of the most serious nature and threaten to end in its utter disruption. Mr. Parnell has, so far, not offered any justification of the serious charges brought up against him in the divorce court. It is most lamentable that a man of his genius and penetration appears so unable to grasp the situation in which he, as a trusted leader, has placed himself before the people of Ireland. When the Liberal party of Protestant England calls so loudly for pure hands and unassailed fame, how can it be expected that the Irish people, with all their characteristic love of purity in morals and sanctity of domestic life, can all at once condone a public scandal, and continue to obey the commands and respect the authority of Mr. Parnell with the same loyal devotion and unquestioning readiness with which, so far, his simplest wishes were acceded to on every occasion of private or public interest. It is true that so far the Irish leader has not even touched upon the question that so agitates men's minds at home and abroad. It may be that he reserves his justification for higher authority and more confidential secrecy than is required of him by his too-ardent followers. It must be allowed us, therefore, to withhold our judgment until the clergy of Ireland have spoken and until such trusted friends of Ireland's cause as the Archbishops of Dublin and Cashel have pronounced their final decision.

From all appearances the unhappy relations of Mr. Parnell with Mrs. Captain O'Shea have brought on a crisis in Irish affairs which must be met manfully, and while we are disposed to condone much in Mr. Parnell's private social life, on account of his undoubted patriotism, we must place the good of Ireland above all personal considerations.

It is to be feared that the crisis which Mr. Parnell's course has brought on will postpone the settlement of the Irish question in a manner acceptable to the people of Ireland, though, of course, the private life even of a trusted leader ought not to have this result. The good cause, however, must win in the end, in spite of present difficulties.

Mr. Gladstone has certainly not