

DOGMA VERSUS THE FACTS OF CHRISTIANITY.

A certain class of Protestant controversialists are fond of distinguishing between the dogmas and the facts of Christianity. They have discovered that they have no basis of certitude in regard to the doctrines which Christ taught, so they ring the changes on the fact of Christ's life and the importance of imitating His spirit and imitating His example. The difficulty of taking a great teacher as an example and guide without being able to determine definitely the principles and truths which He taught is manifest on the very face of things, and of course it gives rise to the most vague, incoherent speculations and the crudest and most inconsistent theories.

We notice in a recent number of our esteemed contemporary, the Congregationalist, an article on "Pure Truth," by the Rev. A. H. Quint, D.D., which furnishes a very good illustration of our subject. The writer alludes to the difficulties and doubts naturally arising out of the fact not only that there are so many different interpretations of Scripture, but that even the Scriptures themselves are full of diverse teachings and varied precepts, abounding in differing representations of the character and government of God, the four evangelists giving differing records of the same course of events—altogether so different from what we should naturally expect in an actual revelation of divine truth designed to guide men to eternal salvation. The writer is evidently puzzled with the difficulties of the Protestants position, and is of course confused in his efforts at a satisfactory explanation. He naturally resorts to the popular distinction between the facts and the dogmas of Christianity. He says: "So far as Biblical truth is concerned I do not know how to get abstract truth. The Bible has not given it to me. It has given me facts which I believe. It has embodied God's law in statutes which I am to obey. It has declared principles which are to govern me. It has promised spiritual powers and supernatural guidance to the needy and the willing. I have not yet seen any chemical analysis which distills some ethereal, pure truth out of all substance and even deprives it of the ether which makes it ethereal."

It is really surprising that an intelligent writer, especially one who has the privilege of adding the significant letters D. D. to his name, should not be conscious of the inconsistency and confusion of his ideas as shown in this passage. The bible, he says, has given no system of abstract truth, yet it has given us God's law in statutes which we are bound to obey, and has declared principles which are to govern us, etc. But the very question is—what are those statutes and those principles? Of course, on Protestant principles, every man must judge for himself; and that really is the same as saying the divine relation is what any and every man may choose to consider it.

Dr. Layman Abbott is more consistent when, in his "Evolution of Christianity," he boldly affirms that: "If man be the ultimate judge of religion, both of the assumed truths he is to hold and of the moral duties they impose, then, of course, all such truths and duties must be fully within his scientific grasp and subject to the investigation of reason alone." He is entirely consistent when he maintains that there never was a divine, supernatural revelation, neither could be; and he strikes at the very foundation of Protestantism when he declares that "an infallible book is an impossible conception."

The intelligent Catholic can not but look upon these men with real pity and commiseration. They are sincere, they are intelligent, they are religious. Their great error, and we may well add, their great misfortune, lies in the fact that they were educated to associate their religion exclusively with a book—that book made up of a miscellaneous collection of ancient documents, historical, prophetic and poetical, and under the new dispensation, of biographical sketches, letters, etc., with no formal, systematic statement of principles, and evidently not designed to be a rule of faith. They know nothing of the definite system of truth revealed and taught to His Apostles by the Great Founder of the Church Himself, the nucleus of which was embodied by them in the oldest symbol of faith extant, the Apostles' Creed, and which through a gradual and natural process of accretion and development has grown into the present magnificent system of Catholic faith and morals.

It is a very simple matter. The historical development of Christianity, as it exists in the Catholic Church, is perfectly natural and legitimate. As we have often remarked, it embodies the combined wisdom of the ages and is the only and the exclusively true and legitimate exponent of divine revelation. The Scriptures are contemporary documents, written, as we believe, by inspired men and useful as confirmatory evidence, of the Church's teaching, but never designed to be a rule of faith and our sole guide in the great and important work of our salvation. Men like Dr. Abbott and their others who have the courage of their convictions are proving the truth of the oft-repeated assertion of Catholic writers, that the only alternative in religion is the Catholic Church or blank naturalism. Darwinian evolutionism and agnosticism.

Is it not a sad reflection that intelligent and good men should be kept from returning to the bosom of Holy Church which has preserved the integrity of the faith and where alone true peace

THE "CHRISTIAN REGISTER" AND INFALLIBILITY.

N. Y. Catholic Review. We take pleasure in acknowledging the courtesy of our esteemed contemporary the Christian Register, in giving its readers, in its issue of July 28, our entire article on "Galileo and Infallibility." Its candid readers can thus judge for themselves the pertinency of the editor's criticism upon that article. "Its main interests," our friend contends, "lies in the earnestness with which it defends the Catholic doctrine of infallibility, and the position which it defends." We made two contentions: first, that in asserting that: "Our Roman Catholic brethren, at least some of them, are fond of maintaining that the Pope and the Church have committed no error," the intelligent editor of the Christian Register ought to know that he uttered an assertion as absurd as it is false. Instead of acknowledging his error or proving his assertion, our friend simply repeats his assertion. He says: "We agree with the Catholic Review in the claim itself is absurd and untenable, though we cannot agree with it in the assumption that some Catholics do not make it. The doctrine of infallibility is an assertion of freedom from error." What is that but an appearance of adhering to his original assertion without any proof, and as if he understood the Catholic doctrine better, and was better acquainted with the facts in the case than we are. He seems determined to carry the idea that whenever the Pope and the Church give a decision, or express an opinion on any subject whatever, Catholics are bound and do actually believe, that that decision or that opinion is necessarily infallible. True, he feels bound to repeat our assertion that "infallibility is not claimed for the Pope or Church in matters of science, but only for *ex cathedra* decisions in faith and morals." "Yes," he says, "in the instance referred to the Church and the Pope did not confine their decision to matters of faith and morals, but made a distinct claim of jurisdiction in matters of science." Well, what if they did, and what if the result proved that they were mistaken, that does not militate against the Catholic doctrine of infallibility, because, as we have said, we do not claim infallibility for the Pope in matters of science. Our friend says: "The decision had to be abandoned which proved that the Church and Pope had exercised authority and assumed knowledge in a sphere in which their knowledge was ignorance and their authority vain." That is the language of strong prejudice; but in admitting it in all its obnoxious strength it does not prove that the Pope is not infallible in faith and morals.

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The truth is that the Pope and the Pontifical Congregations who made the decisions in the case of Galileo were among the most learned men of the time, and as we observed in our former article, the heliocentric system was an unestablished hypothesis. It seemed to conflict with the plain language of Holy Scripture, and as loyal Christians they felt bound to adhere to the literal sense of Scripture until compelled by the firmly established facts of science to adopt a different interpretation. As our friend of the Register does not believe in the inspiration of Holy Scripture he of course does not appreciate the force of the argument. The Scriptures were written in popular language, and as the popular view of the times that view is taken for granted wherever allusion is made to the subject. This system had been taught by scientific writers, and there were many plausible arguments in its favor. One of the strongest arguments against the rotation of the earth was derived from the fact that a stone thrown up would fall back in the same place; whereas if the earth was moving rapidly the stone would necessarily fall at some distance from the point where it was thrown. Newton's discovery of the laws of gravitation had not then been made. In fact the geocentric system seemed to fulfill all the requirements of science as then understood, and as long as there was an apparent conflict between the heliocentric hypothesis and the language of Scripture the authorities of the Church felt bound, as we said, to defend the popular view until compelled by the rigid deductions of science to adopt a different one.

Our friends seem to treat it as almost a crime on the part of the authorities of the Church that they did not at once accept the speculations of Galileo and adopt the heliocentric hypothesis. He seems to forget that the birth of new discoveries in science has generally been after long and painful labors. Even the doctrines of Newton's Principia, like all discoveries which tend to overthrow cherished opinions, were hotly combated for many years. The philosophy of Descartes, which the Newtonian theories at length supplanted, was predominant throughout Europe, and Voltaire said that at the time of his death Newton had not more than twenty followers out of England. "The language of the French mathematician," observes the author of "History of the Inductive Sciences," "is Cartesian for almost half a century after the publication of the Principia of Newton."

If it were a crime in the Catholic authorities to refuse to adopt the heliocentric hypothesis until better established, why have not the Protestants of Germany been condemned for accusing Kepler of heresy and persecuting him for maintaining the same theory? The fact is the Pope is the bugbear. It is the Catholic Church only that is at

THE "SLANDERER."

Against slander there is no defence. It starts with a word—with a nod—with a shrug—with a look—with a smile. It is pestilence walking in darkness, spreading contagion far and wide which the most wary traveller cannot avoid; it is the heart-searching dagger arrow whose wound are incurable; it is the mortal sting of the deadly adder, murder its employment, innocence its prey and ruin its sport. The man who breaks into my dwelling, or meets me on the public road and robs me of my property, does me injury. He strips me on the way to wealth, strips me of my hard-earned savings, involves me in difficulty, and brings my family to poverty and want. But he does me an injury that can be repaired. Industry and economy may again bring me into circumstances of ease and affluence. The man who coming at the midnight hour, breaks my roof, does me an injury—he burns my roof, my pillow, my mattress, my every shelter from the storm and tempest; but he does me an injury that can be repaired. The storm may indeed beat upon me, and chilling blasts assail me, but charity will receive me into her dwelling; will give me food to eat and raiment to put on; will timely assist me, raising a new roof over the ashes of the old, and I shall again sit by my own fireside and taste the sweets of friendship and of home. But the man who circulates false reports concerning my character, which may be represented to my disadvantage, who goes first to this, then that individual, tells them he is my tender of my reputation, enjoins upon them the strictest secrecy, and then fills their ears with hearsays and rumors, and what is worse, leaves them to dwell upon the hints and suggestions of his own busy imagination—the man who thus "fleches from me my good name" does me an injury which neither industry, nor charity, nor time itself can repair.—Sacred Heart Review.

THE "SLANDERER."

It is the Catholic Church only that is at fault. The Pope and the Pontifical Congregations made a mistake, and it will never be forgiven them. It is the standing proof first of fallibility of the Pope and second of the opposition of the Church to learning and progress even in the sciences. Our esteemed friend of the Christian Register is too intelligent to pursue that line of argument and too much of a gentleman to be found in the company of those who do.

THE "SLANDERER."

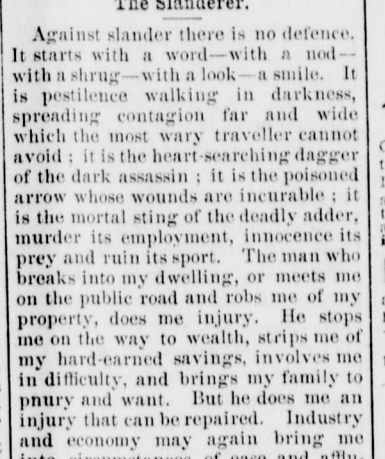
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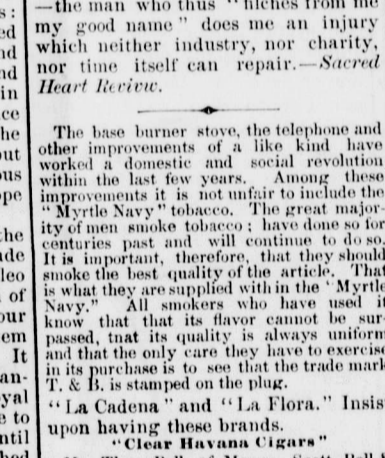
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