

THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION.

(By an Old Reader.)

On next Monday, the 8th December, the Church will celebrate the grand and beautiful feast of the Immaculate Conception. Forty-eight years ago, on the 8th of December, 1854, the dogma of the Immaculate Conception was promulgated by Pope Pius IX., of saintly memory. No more ancient and universally accepted teaching of the Church, yet those who lack both knowledge and appreciation of Catholic dogma, are under the impression that the idea of the Immaculate Conception only dates from the day of that promulgation. Not at all. Had not that article of faith existed before there could have been no promulgation of it. It was not the promulgation that gave rise to the dogma; but the pre-existing dogma that gave rise to the promulgation.

In the "Angelic Salutation" Mary is styled "full of grace." Even in the moment of her conception Mary appears before us as full of grace; for from the first instant she became the lily amid the thorns, that is, she was conceived immaculate, free from all stain of sin. This doctrine is founded on Holy Scripture, and on the primitive and continued belief of the Holy Catholic Church.

The land in which the enemy shall sow no cockle; the burning bush, mentioned in the Book of Exodus, and which burned without being consumed; the Ark of the Covenant, in presence of which the river Jordan ceased to flow,—are all plain figures and emblems of the immaculate conception of the ever-Blessed Virgin.

"Is it becoming," ask all the devout confessors and doctors of the Church, "that she who was destined to give to the world Him Who His death destroyed the kingdom of sin should be herself tainted with sin? Should she, who was to give birth to the conqueror of death and hell, begin by finding herself under the dominion of both?" Finally, how can we conceive the slightest taint being attached to the flesh which was to become the Word made flesh?

St. Peter Chrysologus writes:—"Other saints indeed have received portions of grace, but the fulness thereof was poured out into Mary's heart." And St. Thomas Aquinas says: "The Blessed Virgin has received such a plenitude of grace that she came nearest to the Author of Grace, and for that reason conceived Him Who is full of grace." And he remembered that she shares liberally all her graces with whomsoever seeks the same and is faithful to her. It might be no harm almost on the eve of this great feast to select a few passages from the writings of the holy ones of the past, to edify and instruct all true children of the ever Immaculate Virgin.

In the Mass-book of St. James the Apostle, we read:—"It is becoming, O Blessed Virgin, that we should acknowledge thee to be the wholly immaculate Mother of our God, and more venerable than the cherubim and more glorious than the seraphim. Thou hast borne the Word without any stain, therefore we deem thee great. May all creatures praise and honor thee, who art full of grace. May the angels, too, and all men venerate thee and recognize thee as the consecrated temple, the spiritual garden of delights, and the pride of virgins, from whom God assumed flesh, and whom He honored as a child honors his mother."

St. Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, about the year 200, wrote: "As the whole human family was made subject to death by a virgin, so was it delivered from the same death by a virgin, inasmuch as the obedience of the latter cancelled and made good the disobedience of the former."

St. Gregory, Bishop of Neo-Caesarea, surnamed the miracle-worker, had the happiness of being instructed in the Catholic faith by the Blessed Virgin herself in a vision. Thankful for such a favor he never forgot to praise her before the people, and to repeatedly declare to them the glories of Mary, and am-

ongst those glories that of her freedom from all taint of sin. In the fourth century, St. Epiphanius, Bishop of Salamis, wrote fervently and learnedly of Mary and her freedom from all sin, even that original spot that came to all other children men from our first parents. Similar testimony is found in the eloquent writings of St. Eucherius, Bishop of Lyons. But there is a passage in the works of St. Bonaventure, in which he enumerates the antithesis of the Blessed Virgin, and which stands forth—based entirely upon Holy Scripture—as a refutation of all the enemies of the most exalted of all God's creatures. He says: "Mary was prefigured in the spring that arose out of the earth (Gen. II. 6.); in the tree of life that stood in the midst of paradise (Gen. II. 9.); by the paradise that was watered by the river of pleasure (Gen. II. 10.); by the Ark of Noah, in which the human race was saved; by the rainbow that God set in the clouds (Gen. IX. 13); by the ladder which Jacob saw in his dream (Gen. xxvii.); by the bush that burned and was not consumed (Ex. III.); by the vessel in which the manna was kept, (Ex. xvi.); in the staff of Aaron that budded contrary to nature's law, (Num. xvii. 8); in the star and in the sceptre of which Balaam prophesied (Num. xxiv. 17); by the dove which brought the bough of an olive tree to Noah and his sons in the Ark (Gen. viii.); in the stake that bore the brazen serpent (Num. xxi. 8); in Gedeon's fleece (Judges, vi.); by the house of the Lord which Solomon built, and into which the glory of God entered, (III. Kings vi.); in Abigail, who made peace between Nabal and David (I Kings xxv.); in Judith, who killed Holofernes and delivered the people (Jud. xiii.); in Esther, who saved Mardochai with his people (Esth. vii.); by the gate that was shut and through which no man should pass (Ezech. xiv. 2); in the woman whom John beheld (Apoc. xii.)."

It would be a vast volume that could contain all that had been written by apostle, saint, martyr, and theologian, about Mary, her immaculate conception, her vast prerogatives, the evidences of her bounty, the testimony of her power with God, and the glories that surround her entire life—from earth and in heaven. In fact, no Catholic, no follower of Christ, until the days of Nestorius dared to question her special privilege of being the Mother of God; and no sooner did that heretical teacher raise his voice against the Immaculate Virgin than the Council of Ephesus (A. D. 431) silenced the calumniator and promulgated the dogma that may be considered as the precursor of that equally important dogma of the 8th December, 1854. It is the forty-eighth anniversary of that great day that the Catholic world will celebrate on Monday next—the day when, as an Irish Catholic poet once wrote:

"Plus, our Pontiff King,
Unveiled the Jewelling
Gloriously set in thy bright diadem;
Mary, thy holy face
Mirrors the Saviour's grace,
Mary, our pure, our Immaculate Gem."

It being a feast of obligation, the Immaculate Conception is preceded by a vigil of fast—and the eve being on Sunday this year, that fast is observed on Saturday. There is every reason why we Catholics of this "City of Mary" should celebrate that day in a manner calculated to bring joy to the sacred heart of the Mother of Christ. And in no better way can that be done than by observing the day as we would a Sunday and by frequenting the sacraments, which are sources of grace that are absolutely unfailing. The worthy observance of the 8th of December is a perpetual and eloquent confession of our faith in Mary and our belief in the consoling dogma of her Immaculate existence.

tought in the immediate neighborhood; a great many gallant soldiers from the ranks both of conquerors and conquered, had fallen on the field, never to rise from it again, and a great number of wounded men were carried to the castle. Groans of agony resounded within its precincts as one after another of the stricken men, who awaited their turn to have their wounds dressed, was carried in and laid on the matresses which were spread on the

floor of a large empty room. Swiftly and noiselessly the attendants moved to and fro, executing the briefly worded orders of the medical men, given in low but peremptory tones. At length the last man had received attention, and the wearied doctors and their assistants withdrew, leaving their patients under the care of the Sisters of Mercy, who would remain with them all night.

In a small chamber upstairs lay an officer of high rank in the Prussian army, both of whose legs had been shattered by the bursting of a bomb. The injured limbs had been skillfully amputated, but the prostration consequent on the great loss of blood was such as to leave little hope of his recovery; in fact, the surgeon had that day told the nurse that the sufferer could hardly live through the night.

Kneeling by the open window, her pale features lighted up by the bright afterglow of the sun which had already sunk in the west, the Sister devoutly recited the Rosary, praying earnestly for the soul that was soon to pass from time into eternity.

The sick man made a slight movement, and the Sister went softly to his side and asked him if he felt any easier. She spoke in the Polish language; for the wounded officer was a Polish count and the religious was his fellow-country woman. She was one of a small party of Sisters who had been sent from a convent in Posen to the seat of war to tend the sick and wounded, whether friends or foes.

"I have difficulty in breathing, Sister," he replied; "otherwise I am not in pain."

"Shall I send for a priest, Count?" she next inquired. "You may, perhaps, wish to make your confession. To have one's conscience at peace is often a step toward recovery of physical health and strength."

The officer smiled faintly and said: "Speak frankly, Sister; confess that you do not think that I shall recover and you are desirous that I should not depart out of this world unprepared, if indeed, it comes to that. Am I not right?"

The nurse answered, evasively: "Our life is in the hands of God, and we know not how soon the end may come. Therefore it is well to be prepared to appear before our Judge with a calm conscience."

"Then you think a man dies more peacefully after confession?"

"Yes, I am quite sure of it. A clean conscience and prayer give peace to the heart and inspire one with the hope of a better life hereafter."

"But, Sister, I have got out of the habit of praying, and I never was to confession. I have forgotten how to pray."

"If you will allow me I will help you, Count. We will pray together."

"Then you believe in the power of prayer? Do you really believe that our prayers are of any use?"

"Most assuredly I do. With my whole soul I believe that God hears and answers the supplications that arise from our inmost heart. To prove to you how firmly I believe it, let me tell you that for thirty years I have daily said a decade of the Rosary for the conversion of a certain person, and I shall continue to do so until my dying day; although it is highly improbable that I shall ever know whether my petition has been granted. But, trusting in the all-sufficient merits of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, I feel confident that I have not prayed in vain."

"Who is the fortunate individual for whom you intercede so perseveringly? May I know his name?"

"I have never seen the unhappy man who has forsaken his God. I do not even know his name—at least I know only that his Christian name is Louis, and that he belongs to a family of rank, who are known to be devout Catholics."

"Louis! Louis!" the Count murmured. "Tell me, Sister, what has induced you to pray for this erring Louis if he is quite a stranger to you?"

"It is too long a story to tell you, Count. I am afraid it will weary you."

"Nothing of the sort. Tell me your story; it will serve to while away the time that must elapse before I either regain my strength or pass from hence."

"Do you think it will interest you?"

"It will interest me more than you imagine. Begin at once, I am anxious to hear it."

"My father," the Sister began, "lost all his property through unfortunate circumstances. Soon after he died, leaving my mother almost penniless, with four children dependent on her. One day a lady came to see us, and took us all to live with her. I remember that she was very pretty, but had an extremely sad expression of countenance. My mother made herself useful in the house, and our hostess gave us chil-

dren a good education. I felt called to the religious life; my mother consented to my entering a convent; our benefactress gave me a small dowry and sent me, with her blessing, to Paris, where I passed my novitiate."

"On the day of my clothing my mother said: 'You know, my child, that, after God, we owe everything to our munificent benefactress. She was my dearest friend when we were both girls, and she has been a good friend to you. I know you love her. Have you never wondered why she was so fair, so wealthy, so benevolent, should always appear sorrowful?'—'I have often remarked how sad she was,' I answered; 'and could not understand why she was not happy.' 'A secret grief casts its shadow over her life,' said my mother. 'She had one sister, to whom she was fondly attached; and this sister on her deathbed gave her only son into her charge, begging her to watch over him. That nephew, although most carefully brought up, had no sooner left school than he cast aside restraint and entered on the path of sin and destruction. Not only did he set at naught his soul's welfare; he ruined his health, gambled away his fortune, and by his irregular life broke his aunt's heart; for she doted on him, despite all his misdeeds. If you would prove your gratitude to our friend, say a prayer daily for her nephew Louis, that he may see the error of his ways and return to God. God alone can work that miracle of grace.'"

"I solemnly promised to pray every day for his conversion; and I have kept my word, although my mother and our benefactress have been dead for twenty years. Just now, while you were asleep, the thought of that unhappy man suddenly recurred to my mind, and I felt terribly anxious about him. I knelt down directly, and earnestly entreated God to save him. I felt certain that some calamity threatened to overtake him—something worse even than death. Perhaps at this very moment he is in extreme danger."

The Sister uttered these last words almost in a whisper, as if speaking to herself rather than to the sick man. When she turned and looked at him, she was startled and alarmed. His eyes were half closed, two large tears were rolling down his pallid cheeks, and his hands trembled so violently that the silken coverlet rustled.

"My sad story has agitated you, Count," she exclaimed. "I ought not to have told it to you. Forgive me! I will go and call the doctor."

"No, do not go, dear Sister—pray do not go! Only tell me one thing more. You must know the name of the lady who was aunt to the Louis of whom you speak. Tell me what it was."

"The name of that kind lady was Helene von Raborowska. Her maiden name was Von Granowska. Her family estate was near Granowa, and to that her nephew was the heir."

Then the Count groaned aloud and hid his face.

"Sister," he said, with a trembling voice, "it was for me that you prayed so long. I am that Louis—that miserable wretch who broke his foster mother's heart by his wickedness and folly."

The Sister clasped her hands and with tears in her eyes, exclaimed: "O my dear Lord's Providence which has made me cross your path, and has touched your heart by means of my simple story! Do not, I beseech you, thrust from you the hand of a merciful God stretched out to your heart, so that after death you receive you. Turn to Him with all my rejoins that noble lady whom you loved in spite of all your errors—I see it by your tears. Shall I go at once and fetch the priest?"

The Count said nothing but nodded his head as a sign of consent.

For two long hours the priest sat by the Count's side; then he administered the sacraments to him. He received them with profound contrition and fervent devotion. When he was once more alone with Sister Angelica, he raised her hand to his lips and said with heartfelt joy:

"Sister, you understand the happiness that fills my soul now that I have made my peace with God. For a long time past my life has been embittered by stings of conscience and self-reproach. Words fail me to describe, to express the happiness I feel; and for this I have to thank you. It is to your persevering prayers, after God and our Blessed Lady, that I owe my conversion, that I am enabled to hope and trust that my soul will be saved by the mercy of God."

The next morning, when the sun poured its golden beams upon the old castle, Count Louis was no longer among the living. With his latest breath he extolled the loving kindness of God, and expressed his grateful thanks to Sister Angelica for her prayers. They had remained with him most faithfully and were ready to

peace for a sinner at the close of an ill spent life, through the intercession of Our Lady, Queen of the Most Holy Rosary.

This incident shows the power exercised by faith and charitable intercession on behalf of another; for, as St. Chrysostom remarks, a man often owes his cure to the faith of someone else. Wherefore let us learn in seasons of sickness and affliction to claim the assistance of others. As Scripture says, "The Lord will hear the prayers of the just," and will grant to the loving intercession of another what He has denied to your own prayers. Above all, entreat the Blessed Mother of God to add her powerful word to your petitions, remembering that what she asks of her Divine Son is invariably granted. —Exchange.

Belgium's Progress

It is a curious phenomenon of the beginning of the twentieth century, that while there are some three hundred millions of Catholics throughout the world, while many of the greatest countries in Europe and America are almost wholly or overwhelmingly Catholic in their population, while Catholics everywhere are accused by their enemies of an inordinate desire for political power, there is after all but one country in the whole world which is governed by Catholics on Catholic principles. It is not a big country—a good train will spin you from one end to another of it in a few hours. But in those few hours Belgium will teach the anti-Catholic and the Imperialist more than they could learn elsewhere in as many years.

The first curious fact about this Catholic Government is that it was enjoyed the longest tenure of life of any popular government in the world to-day. Belgium possesses the nearest approach to universal suffrage that has hitherto been realized—much nearer even than the United States—yet the majority of voters has never once since 1834 failed to pronounce in favor of its Catholic Government.

The Paris "Figaro" the other day called attention to the fact that since the Catholic government has been in power in Belgium the total of Belgian commerce has increased 25 per cent. More recently still, the report of the Belgian Budget for 1901 contains the following interesting statement: "Belgium, in proportion to its population, continues to maintain the first place in foreign commerce. It surpasses France by 20 per cent., the United States by 345 per cent. and Germany by 172 per cent. In 1884 the foreign commerce (importation and exportation) of Belgium amounted to 2,763 millions of francs; every year since then it has gone on increasing until in 1899 it reached the magnificent sum of 4,209 millions. The rate of increase has therefore been 52.3 per cent. During the same time England has had an increase of 20.3 per cent., France 15.5 per cent., and Germany alone, within the last fifteen years, has surpassed Belgium's rate of increase."

There are in Belgium about four millions of workers, and calculating for each one of them direct taxes at the rate of 565 francs the government receives from them twenty-three millions of francs. But on the other hand, it spends for them, the laboring classes, thirteen millions in pensions, two millions in subsidies, and nine millions more for workingmen's trains from the large towns to the suburbs; so that the government actually spends for the laboring classes a million francs more than it receives from them in direct taxation.

One of the most hackneyed accusations made against Catholic powers is that they are opposed to education. Belgium, for one, gives the lie direct to this charge. In 1884 the 4,887 schools depending upon the state contained 345,687 boys and girls. Ten years later the number of state schools had risen to 5,788, with 652,039 scholars, and three years later again the numbers had gone up still further to 6,608 schools and 754,272 scholars. Thus in the short period of thirteen years, the Catholic government actually doubled the number of children in the public schools, while largely increasing the efficiency of the latter.—New York Freeman's Journal.

WALTER G. KENNEDY,
DENTIST,
708 Lagachetiere (Palais St.)
Two Doors West of Beaver Hall,
Montreal.

ON CREMATION.

At the late Mass in the Church of the Immaculate Conception, Boston, last week, Rev. Thomas I. Gasson, S.J., discussed the attitude of the Catholic Church toward the cremation movement.

Father Gasson showed that Pope Leo XIII. by a decree of May 19, 1886, had forbidden Catholics to adopt, under ordinary circumstances, this method of disposing of the dead. "It must be borne in mind," said Father Gasson, "that this decree is not one of faith, but simply of discipline, that is, the Church for wise reasons, judges it ill-advised and contrary to Christian tradition to thrust the body of the departed into a crematory."

"If experience should show that public health demands cremation, there is no doubt that the Church will accommodate her legislation so as to sanction any reverent manner of caring for the bodies of the deceased."

"To say that cremation would interfere with the resurrection of the body is a puerile statement. Is it any more of a miracle for the Divine Power to resurrect the body from the ashes which are the result of cremation than to resurrect the body from the dust which is the result of burial? Both are equally possible to Divine Omnipotence."

"The Church's objection is based upon the fact that burial is the practice which she received from the Jewish Church, to which she is the successor. Burial, too, was the method chosen for the disposition of the Saviour's dead body—a method naturally followed by all fervent Christians. Burial, likewise, appears to be the more consonant to human nature. The body is the temple in which the principle of life dwells; it itself is destined, according to a Christian teaching, for an endless life, at the close of the world's soul-stirring tragedy."

"Even when deprived of the spirit which thrilled it and made it pulse with life, the body does not become an object of terror or of horror, but rather a precious relic, to be reverently and lovingly dealt with. The old painting even when the colors have lost their glow and the face has lost its expression, and only a vague outline remains to tell us of the one it portrays, is not thrown ruthlessly into the fire, but still remains in an honored position among the household treasures."

"The photograph of bygone years, with its slowly vanishing figure, finds a welcome place among our possessions and is shown with joy to our admiring friends. And so the church would fain keep the shrine of an undying spirit as long as possible in its natural form, until the forces of nature have accomplished in slow dignity their work of separation. The violent hand shall be held from the form which is to come back to life."

"Hence, the Church prefers the quiet method of placing her dead in hallowed ground, where they may peacefully rest. Hence, too, she prefers to speak, not of the graveyard, but of the cemetery (sleeping place), because the latter accords better with her idea that death is not the close of all, but only a passing slumber between this life of test and trial and the life of eternal joy."

"Nor should it be forgotten that in Europe cremation is too often regarded as an open profession of anti-Christian sentiment. Let us deal tenderly and lovingly with our dead, reverencing their bodies and honoring with scrupulous loyalty their memories."

Premium TO Subscribers.

We offer as a premium to each Subscriber a neatly bound copy of the Golden Jubilee Book, who will send the names and cash for 3 new Subscribers to the True Witness.

This is a splendid opportunity to obtain a most interesting chronicle of the work of Irish Catholic Priests and laymen in Montreal during the past thirty years.

The Church In Gu

"Thirty-two years of education in the name of the later history of the Church in Catholic Gu are assured by Father noz, who has been driven native land, and is now a Catholic parish in Cabrera, the President, the chief actor on the archbishops and the have died in exile. The canons were proscribed. All religious congregations, have been suppressed, and their property expropriated. The homeless nun begging for food. One shot, another died of the ed. The few allowed to remain clothed in religious dress, or distinct their profession. All Catholics were suppressed, property declared to be government. The sacred robes from the altars things of value from the monasteries. The proceeds of religious vandalism amount to \$100,000. Much of this was destined or used in colleges, hospitals, etc. from the poor."

Everything was secularized, education, marriage, cemeteries. This state of affairs yet, Catholicism penalized, and nominal. To hinder them, the government insists that the penalty for violation of regulations is \$5000."

is to be said of marriage. The government exacts one dollar a church bell is tolled and the church bells are summoned the children to school. It should say to say that the "Godless." The children public—are taught that has been brutalized by."

All manifestation of religion is rigorously proscribed, but the Protestants—not the party repugnant acts of intolerance or encouraged feast of Minerva is a goddess being represented clad girl, who is photographed the President at the clival. The feast is held in the towns of the Republics at the festival of Minerva. The temple of Minerva fell during the monies and her representatives killed outright. Not the President, had the in white marble."

Lately the helpless showing some signs of the secret society revolution young men are awakened established a Catholic —The Review.

The agitation against 'Irishman' is spreading country. Two varieties insisted upon doing stage caricature of were hissed from the stage by indignant members H. in the Jacques O. Waterbury, Conn.

The actors who incite pleasure of the Waterbury were James Sullivan, Keeler. The curtain was rung down and another substituted. Thomas county president of the ed that he wished it up the action was not an anger on the part of a able persons, but it was the A.O.H. and all representatives who object to see Irish targets of every variety finds it profitable to sh-

FELL INTO W

Miss Jennie Kelly, age, who formerly lived Goulding, Glencoe, but on a farm three miles with a fatal accident, went to the well to draw water, having on new shoes about to draw it slipped and fell into the well.

was drowned.

The Power of Prayer.

A hot summer's day was drawing to a close, and the setting sun cast a crimson glow on the walls of a somewhat gloomy looking castle, which, vacated by the proprietors, had been hastily converted into a military hospital. A few days before, a terrible battle had been

fought in the immediate neighborhood; a great many gallant soldiers from the ranks both of conquerors and conquered, had fallen on the field, never to rise from it again, and a great number of wounded men were carried to the castle. Groans of agony resounded within its precincts as one after another of the stricken men, who awaited their turn to have their wounds dressed, was carried in and laid on the matresses which were spread on the