

THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION
OF THE
VIRGIN MARY.

The 8th December, 1854, the present Pope Pius IX was sitting on his throne; a triple crown of gold and diamonds was on his head; silk and damask—red and white—vestments were on his shoulders; five hundred mitred prelates were surrounding him; and more than fifty thousand people were at his feet, in the incomparable St. Peter's Church of Rome.

After a few minutes of most solemn silence, a Cardinal, dressed with his purpled robe, left his seat, and gravely walked towards the Pope, kneeled before him, and humbly prostrating himself at his feet, said: "Holy Father: tell us if we can believe and teach that the Mother of God, the Holy Virgin Mary, was immaculate in her conception?"

The Supreme Pontiff answered: "I do not know; let us ask the light of the Holy Ghost."

The Cardinal withdrew; the Pope and the numberless multitude fell on their knees; and the harmonious choir sang the "Veni Creator Spiritus."

The last note of the sacred hymn had rolled under the vaults of the Temple, when the same Cardinal left his place, and again advanced towards the throne of the Pontiff, prostrated himself at his feet, and said: "Holy Father, tell us if the Holy Mother of God, the blessed Virgin Mary, was immaculate in her conception."

The Pope answered: "I do not know; let us ask the light of the Holy Ghost."

And, again, the "Veni Creator Spiritus" was sung.

The most solemn silence had, a second time, succeeded to the melodious sacred song, when again the eyes of the multitude were following the grave steps of the purple-robed Cardinal, advancing, for the third time, to the throne of the successor of St. Peter, to ask again: "Holy Father, tell us if we can believe that the blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, was immaculate?"

The Pope, as if he had just received a direct communication from God, answered with a solemn voice: "Yes! we must