

A DOCTRINE DEFINED.

What an Indulgence is in the Catholic Church.

There are few doctrines of the Catholic Church which have been more grossly misrepresented by Protestant writers than the doctrine of Indulgences. That an Indulgence means not only the full pardon of sins committed but a license to commit future sins, is a commonly received opinion among our non-Catholic friends. They allege, moreover, that the most essential condition for obtaining an Indulgence is the payment to the priest of a certain sum of money. Even otherwise intelligent Protestants impute to us these revolting tenets. Yet, writes Archbishop Keen of St. Louis, many of them are doubtless acquainted, perhaps intimately acquainted, with Catholics when they are compelled to recognize as their equals in keenness of knowledge as well as in delicacy of conscience. Does it never occur to them that ladies and gentlemen of refinement of manners, of mental culture, of unquestioned moral character could not bring themselves to profess a doctrine so repugnant to reason and to the first principles of Christian morality? Should not the inference be unmistakably clear—namely, that they must have put a wrong construction on the teaching of the Catholic Church upon this point? But how can they ascertain what the real doctrine of the Church is? Where shall they seek the needed information? Not surely from her enemies; not in works written on purpose to assail her doctrines and practices. We refer them to the very sources whence Catholics themselves derive their knowledge of Catholic teaching: not alone to the ponderous tomes over which the theologian delights to pore, but to the most elementary of all Catholic books of instruction—the little Catechism from which our children learn the rudiments of their religion. Does the Catholic Catechism tell us that an Indulgence is the pardon of sins committed? On the contrary, it says that our sins must first be forgiven, before an Indulgence can be gained. Does the Catechism say that Indulgence is a license to commit sin? No, it expressly repudiates this absurd and blasphemous interpretation of our doctrine. Does the Catechism inform us that money can purchase the benefits attached to an Indulgence? It certainly does not.

The Catechism succinctly yet correctly defines an Indulgence to be "the remission, in whole or in part, of the temporal punishment due to sin, after the guilt has been forgiven." This definition we shall proceed to explain as briefly and clearly as possible. First. No sin is remitted or forgiven by an Indulgence. The guilt of every sin, great and small, i. e., mortal and even venial, must be erased from the soul in order that an Indulgence granted by the Church may move all liability to temporal punishment; and the temporal remission of any part of the temporal punishment by an Indulgence necessarily supposes freedom from all grievous or mortal sin. The ordinary means provided by Christ for the forgiveness of all sins committed after baptism, is the sacrament of penance, and the most essential disposition on the part of the sinner for the worthy reception of that sacrament is sincere contrition or sorrow of heart; indeed, when the contrition is perfect, it remits sin even before the application of the sacramental grace. This explanation completely refutes the false view so commonly entertained by those outside the Church, that by an Indulgence we mean the pardon of sin.

Second. What is understood by temporal punishment? It means the punishment which often and generally remains due to sin, whether venial or mortal, even when the guilt of the sin has been blotted out from the soul. It is called the temporal because, whether endured in this world or in the next, it will last only for a time; in contradistinction to the eternal punishment of hell which every mortal sin deserves. The liability to eternal punishment which attaches to mortal sin ceases as soon as the sin itself is effaced from the soul. That some punishment remains due to the justice of God, even when the sin has been forgiven, is consonant to the dictates of reason and the teachings of Holy Writ. Even when powerful influences plead for the convicted criminal, does not the majesty of the law demand some chastisement? Yes, even human mercy cannot forget what is due to public justice. We find the same principle taught and illustrated in the pages of Holy Scripture. Writing to the Colossians (1, 24) St. Paul says: "I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up those things which are wanting of the sufferings of Christ, in my flesh, for His body, which is the Church. Does not the Saviour recommend the practice of bodily mortifications to all His disciples? Does He exempt those even who are free from sin? Did not God punish David for his great sin, even after He had declared by His prophet Nathan that the sin itself had been forgiven? (2 Kings, Protestant version, 2 Samuel xii, 13 et seq.) Our first parents are a still earlier example of the same truth. God pardoned their sin of disobedience, but He inflicted on them centuries of the most rigorous hardships. So too were Moses and Aaron pardoned their sin, which was but a slight transgression of the divine command, and yet they were both punished by being deprived of the pleasure of entering into the promised land. (Num. xx., Deut. xxxiv.)

When the regenerating waters of holy baptism are poured on the head, the soul is indeed cleansed from every stain of every sin, and freed from all

liability to punishment for any actual sins before committed. There is truly a new birth, giving to the baptized all the privileges of a child of God and an heir of heaven. But when these glorious privileges have been again forfeited by sin, they are not so easily recovered in all their fullness. Hear what St. Paul says on this subject: "It is impossible—I, e., morally impossible—or extremely difficult—for those who were once enlightened, have tasted also, the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and are fallen away, to be renewed again unto penance, etc." (Heb. vi., 4 5 G.) God has justly reserved some penalty for transgressions which assume a blacker dye, when committed by those who, through the sacrament of regeneration, had become His children. These must make some atonement for their ingratitude to so good a Father, if this satisfaction to the divine justice is not made in this world, it must be made, even to the last farthing, in the purifying fires of Purgatory. Such is the interpretation ever put on those words of our Blessed Saviour in Luke xii., 58-59, and Matt. v., 25. With these few words of explanation, it is easy to understand the purpose and effect of an Indulgence. It is intended to remit, in whole or in part, this temporal punishment due to sin already forgiven. How different this true idea of our doctrine is from the misconception of it which fills the minds of most Protestants.

Third. When a Catholic fulfils all the conditions for gaining an Indulgence offered by the Church, and thereby secures the remission of any part of the temporal punishment which his sins deserve, the justice of God is not defrauded of that full satisfaction due by the sinner. This is the next point we wish to explain. We all know and admit that Christ's satisfaction for sin is simply infinite in itself and therefore inexhaustible. Moreover, Catholics believe that the good works of all the just, who are living members of Christ, are the works of Christ Himself, their divine Head. The Church has ever indignantly repudiated and reprobated the Protestant doctrine of mere imputed justice. When God pardons the sinner, He does not merely cloak over his foulness with Christ's merits, as the "Reformers" held, but He blots out the stain of sin from the soul, beautifies it with His holy grace and vivifies it with His divine life. Each soul thus united to Christ may truly say with St. Paul: "I live, now not I, but Christ liveth in me." (Gal. ii., 20.) Yes, in such a soul, Christ lives and works, and therefore the good works of the just are not only meritorious of a reward, but they possess an expiatory virtue—that is, they not only deserve a reward proportionate to their value in God's sight, but also merit the remission of the temporal punishment due to sin. This last effect of good works—their efficacy in remitting the temporal chastisement for sin committed—may far exceed in value before God the debt which they perform them owe to His justice. Of this God alone can judge; He alone can estimate their value. But whatever is not needed by him who performs the good works for the remission of the temporal punishment his own sins deserve, goes to make up, together with the merits of Christ, a common treasury, placed at the Church's disposal for the benefit of her needy children. Hence when in virtue of an Indulgence, the deserved punishment is remitted, God always receives the satisfaction which He claims and which His justice demands. The debt due to Him is paid to its full amount out of the treasury laid up in the Church—the inexhaustible treasury of the merits of Christ and His saints.

Let it not be said that we derogate from the atonement of Christ when we attribute to the Christian in the state of grace the power of performing works both meritorious of an eternal recompense and efficacious in satisfying for the temporal punishment which sin deserves; rather do we thereby enhance the precious value of that divine redemption, since it is only by a vital union with Christ that the Christian possesses such a power. Let it also be borne in mind that nothing is called the Divine Redeemer Himself can expiate the eternal penalty which mortal sin deserves. Immense as the satisfactory good works of all the saints must be, they can purchase for us only the remission of that temporal punishment of which we have spoken.

Fourth. That the Church has the power of applying the merits of our Lord and His saints directly by way of Indulgences to her children on earth, and indirectly by way of suffrage to the souls in Purgatory, is a dogma of our holy faith. This power is manifestly implied in the words of Christ to His apostles: "Whatsoever you shall bind upon earth, shall be bound also in heaven; and whatsoever you shall loose upon earth, shall be loosed also in heaven." (Matt. xviii., 18.) This same power given to all His Apostles conjointly, Christ gave to Peter singly. "And to thee shall I give the keys of the Kingdom of heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt bind upon earth, shall be bound also in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose upon earth, shall be loosed also in heaven." (Matt. xvi., 19.) This concession of power to loose the sinner from all bonds whatsoever is unrestricted. Indeed if the Church through the sacraments has power to free the repentant sinner from the guilt and eternal punishment of his sins, a fortiori, must she possess the power to relieve him from his lesser punishment. St. Paul seems to have exercised just such a power in the case of the incestuous Corinthian. (2 Cor.

ii., 10.) We know from tradition that the Church has claimed and exercised this power from the earliest ages. One fact suffices to prove this. How often were not the severe canonical penances, which had been imposed on those who denied the faith, mitigated or entirely remitted on the recommendation of the holy martyrs and confessors? We learn from Tertullian that such intercession of the saintly confessors and holy martyrs was deemed efficacious even in remitting the sin itself—much more than the punishment due to it.

We willingly acknowledge that the use of Indulgences in the early Church was not as frequent as in later times. But the power to grant Indulgences and their use are two very different things. It is a doctrine of faith that the Church has, and always has had, this power; but the exercise of this power pertains to the discipline of the Church, which she is at liberty to change as she considers most conducive to the good of her children. In primitive times, the Church may not have deemed it necessary or useful to use this power to any great extent. It is certain that then there was very much more fervor among Christians. The very severity of the canonical penance, so cheerfully performed, shows that they were not afraid to expiate in full, if possible, here below, the temporal pain due to their sins. As long as this generous spirit possessed them, the Church did not judge it wise to check their noble sacrifice, and she found not the same reasons to mitigate her discipline by the exercise of a power the use of which was left to her own discretion. Should she consider it proper, she could at any time alter her discipline as to grant these favors more rarely, or to suppress them entirely.

Fifth. The terms used in the grant of Indulgences requires a few words of explanation. When a full and entire remission of all temporal punishment is offered, the Indulgence is called Plenary. For obtaining all the efficacy of a Plenary Indulgence, a person must be free from even venial sin and from all affections to it. Few persons have dispositions so perfect; and hence the remission of the penalty due to their sins, when Indulgences are called Partial because their effect is ordinarily restricted to the removing of some part only of the punishment of sin. The language in which the grant of Partial Indulgences is made, is sometimes misunderstood even by Catholics. To understand the meaning attached by the Church to such expressions as an Indulgence of seven years, of five years, of three hundred days, of one hundred days, etc., we must recall the discipline of the early ages. Then public or canonical penances were imposed, sometimes indeed for life, some times for a fixed period of years or days. When now the Church grants an Indulgence, say, of seven years, she means to attach to the worthy performance of the conditions imposed, the efficacy for the remission of temporal punishment as seven years of canonical penitential works would have possessed. None but God can know just what that efficacy is. Some seem to imagine that the years or days designated in the concession of an Indulgence signify years or days of release from the expiating fires of Purgatory. But the Church has no such intention. Indeed, when an Indulgence is made applicable to the Holy Souls in Purgatory, the application is but a form of earnest supplication to the mercy of God, that, in view of the merits of Christ and His Saints, He may shorten or mitigate the sufferings of those Holy Souls; for the Church claims no direct jurisdiction over those who have left this world.

Sixth. One who wishes to gain an Indulgence has sometimes to comply with other conditions; especially in the true Plenary Indulgences. Very often confession, Holy Communion, certain prayers, visits to churches and almsgiving are prescribed. The object to which the alms are to be applied may be designated. That abuses have arisen in connection with the use of Indulgences is quite possible; but abuses are no valid argument against their use. Such abuses have ever met the severest condemnation of the Church, which cannot be held responsible for the wrong doing of individuals. But we do not doubt but that there has been much exaggeration in the reports of alleged abuses.

Seventh. We do not dwell on the priceless benefits that accrue from Indulgences. The very doctrine on which they are grounded is a constant reminder of God's inexorable justice, and of the dreadful consequences of sin, both here and hereafter. Happy they who avail themselves of this proffered means of atoning for their transgressions, and thus mitigate at least the rigors of the judgment which awaits every soul in the hour of death.

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JOHN DILLON, M. P. Comprehensive Sketch of the Irish Party Leader.

Among the Irish Catholic people at home and abroad perhaps the man that fills the largest space of public attention to-day is Mr. John Dillon, M. P., the newly elected leader of the Nationalist Party. Of course every Irishman the world over has for years past been familiar with the name of John Dillon, as he were in the last generation with that of his distinguished father; but his present elevation to a very responsible position has given added fame and interest to his person and career. It is, therefore, fitting that fresh notes of the patriotic Irishman's life and character should be put before American readers. Having been born of parents whose love and devotion to the cause of suffering Ireland were phenomenal, it is natural to expect that the new leader came legitimately by those Celtic qualities which endear him to the Irish Celtic race, but apart from what he inherited he has developed in his own personality abundant qualities and characteristic features that make him trusted and esteemed by the Irish nation, and by the whole Celtic race, everywhere, and by his Irish Parliamentary colleagues and by both sides in the British House of Commons.

Tributes of respect from the latter body are not usually given to Irish members who have to fight the battle of their country on the floor of that aristocratic chamber, but Mr. John Dillon has won their good opinion by his long and persistent efforts on behalf of Ireland, by his honorable methods and by his frankness and fearlessness in making his demands, and not less by the clearness and lucidity of his arguments. Perhaps no living Irishman has been more frank and fearless than has John Dillon in telling the English Government how badly Ireland is governed, and how unjustly she has been treated; and yet Englishmen cannot cavil at Mr. Dillon, because his presentation of his country's grievances is always made with calmness, force and reason and in good taste and temper. He is not called a great tactician, nor does he aim to cultivate this faculty. The inherent honesty of his nature inclines the other way. The systematic use of tactics means artfulness and cunning, and may be mixed with subterfuge. Mr. Dillon's strength does not lie in that direction; he deals in straightforward statements and in clear declarations. He does not even claim to be an orator; neither did the late Mr. Parnell—both of these honest leaders has always depended more upon the power of solid, clear and logical argument to convince and impress than to great heights of oratory. Nevertheless, Mr. Dillon, as his deceased predecessor, makes a lasting impression when he speaks in Parliament, or before English audiences on the burning Irish question or other important public affairs. His well matured thoughts have weight and force to carry conviction to the minds of his hearers. This merely refers to his oratorical strength before alien assemblies and in a foreign Parliament. The case is greatly altered when he speaks to his compatriots on the hill-sides of Ireland in any of the four provinces. With his own people his weight and influence are irresistible; and it could not well be otherwise, for his name and career are so thoroughly identified with what is true, reliable and patriotic, therefore the Irish Celtic people willingly accept Mr. Dillon's words as the frank and truthful utterances of a leader and guide who never deceived them, and whom they consider incapable of doing so. If, however, the observer wishes to make an exact calculation of this leader's usefulness and strength, personally and otherwise, he will discover that his commanding position in politics and in the estimation of his countrymen is due more to force of character and real steadfastness of purpose than to any other feature in his personality. It has been said by some opponents in Ireland that John Dillon is a melancholy man. The allegation is not correct, for, despite the worries and conflicts of his nearly twenty years' struggle on behalf of his native land, he still retains his genial and sociable nature; he enjoys a joke with great relish, and he can tell amusing and entertaining stories from the repository of his well-stored mind and tenacious memory. He dines out a good deal, and is always a welcome guest at the festive boards and in the best English society. He is an entertaining companion as he is a well read man, and has a very intimate acquaintance with foreign lands; he would feel at home anywhere on the European continent, or for that matter in this American continent, where he has hosts of warm, personal friends, and the respect and good-will of the Irish element. I think I am correct in saying that he lived for some time on a ranch in Colorado. Then he has travelled extensively in Australia and New Zealand. In fact, if a wayfarer wanted guidance even in any of these remote lands, Mr. Dillon could give it to him. It must not be understood from this that our subject makes a boast of his acquired knowledge in this respect, for he never speaks of it in any occasion demands it, or an interested friend seeks for useful information, or perchance a fellow-traveller wishes to talk over old times and past sensations in distant climes. All this valuable information relating to the political, social and industrial conditions of other countries will be of great service to the new leader in the responsible position he has now assumed; it will enable him to make comparisons and to

draw conclusions; for instance, in Canada he saw a British colony, peacefully free and self-governing; in Australia he beheld pretty much kindred conditions. But touching the importance of his new sphere of action the question will be asked in what consists his fitness for leadership and his qualifications for political life? Unprejudiced Irishmen will say they are many and substantial. Standing first perhaps is his life-long devotion to the cause of his country, and his thorough comprehension of all subjects that concern its welfare; then follow his great natural ability, well-trained by long experience; his ready gift of speech, and his indomitable courage, keen reasoning power and a placidity of temper that nothing can rattle. This last feature is of vast advantage to a leader who will have to withstand the sneers of some brutal Englishmen in and outside the House of Commons, and occasionally the poisoned shaft of some embittered rival of his own race and creed.

Taking him all in all, it is not likely that Mr. Dillon has entered upon his present onerous and very troublesome office without some degree of misgiving; but he is not the man to shrink from responsibility, and having once accepted the position he will fulfill the duties of his charge courageously and in accordance with his conception of what he believes to be best for his party and his country.

It is well for the interests of Home Rule that the Nationalist party have chosen a leader of such strong fibre and unflinching patriotism, and one that represents in his own personality traditions that are sacred to the Irish race.

John Dillon the elder was a rebel of '48, and was willing to do or die for Ireland; but his keen judgment convinced him of the hopelessness of the struggle in that day, and, seeing he could not avert it, he fearlessly joined Smith O'Brien in the unequal combat, ready to sacrifice his fortune and his life for the freedom of his country.

He had to suffer the penalty of exile for many years, but on his return to Ireland he was elected member of Parliament, and in the British House his admirable display of moderation, judgment and statesmanship drew to his side John Bright and some of the ablest English statesmen of the day.

It was then that the idea first took shape of uniting the forces of liberal-minded Englishmen in an alliance with Irishmen of true national instinct, to effect some relief for Ireland. The movement was to be marked by a banquet to John Bright in Dublin, at which Mr. John Dillon was to preside. The event took place and Mr. Bright made a famous oration, but Mr. Dillon was then in his coffin or his grave, having died somewhat suddenly a few days previously. The present John Dillon was very young then, but he was old enough to catch the fire and inspiration of the time, and they have not since ceased to maintain the life and warmth of his pure Celtic blood. John Dillon is the worthy son of a noble father.—Wm. Ellison, Bowmanville, Ont., in the Catholic Union and Times, of Buffalo.

A Good Story of Curran.

James Payn in his "English Notes," in the Independent, is reminded of a good story of Curran, by the proposal on foot in London to build an animals' hospital in memory of Jack, Judge Hawkins' dog. Promising that English judges, "the good ones at least," have always been fond of animals, he says:

Judge Clare, who hated Curran, used to bring a large dog with him on to the bench, to whom he gave more attention than to the counsel. Once when his lordship was fondling the animal at an important point in the case, the advocate stopped.

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