

LANDMARKS OF THE CHURCH.

That there does exist at the present day an Institution (to call it by no better name) that claims to be the expression of a Divine Revelation, and that its claim is characterized by the special marks we have enumerated, is a fact which cannot be denied. Whether or not such indications are accepted as evidence of the truth or of such a claim, they do especially belong to this existing organization in a sense in which no other can lay claim to them. They are external marks which all combine to distinguish one, and one only, religious system, amid a great variety of other creeds that surround it. Later we must consider what tokens in addition this system claims as distinctive of its position. At present we are only dealing with those which are apparent to the outsider, and which must attract his attention, apart from any bias or interest he may have as to the conclusion he will arrive at. He sees as a fact an existing Institution before him, which possesses the characteristics he first came to the conclusion a true Revelation would manifest: which also is of great antiquity and historic importance, and which shows no shade of hesitation in advancing its claims upon the human race. Need it be added that this Institution is the *Catholic Church*? It remains to test the question by the marks we have enumerated.

A. Universal. The Catholic Church is universal, in the sense that it is within the reach of all, and suited to the requirements of all. It has no distinction for age, nationality, or individuals. It imparts to the wisest the same faith that it gives to the child, and which, for the same reasons, is held with an equal certainty by both. It dictates its dogmas with equal clearness to the humblest peasant or to the keenest philosopher, and while the capacity of either can equally accept its faith, it demands an equal submission from both. It includes among its members every possible variety of nation, age, colour, ability and occupation. The judge on the bench, with a mind trained in the sifting of evidence, and cultivated to the formation of a sound judgment; the actress who comes from the plaudits of a delighted audience to the altar of the Church's daily worship; the skilled physician; the soldier of many battle-fields; the peer, the peasant, the student, the man of business; the cold inhabitant of northern climes, the ruddy-cheeked southerner, the dusky Indian—in fact all nations, languages and tongues, all sorts and conditions of men equally are found swelling the ranks of the two hundred and fifty millions of the church's children. even her enemies allow that the Faith of the Catholic Church is the only truly Universal One.

B. Identical. More remarkable than her universality is the fact of her identity, by which all the manifold minds within her pale are absolutely in accordance as to what they believe, and owing to which her teaching is always everywhere the same. No other system has combined universality with identity in this sense. When the mind recalls the infinite variety of differences of every degree which in other respects separate her members, the contrast of the identity of their faith and whole mental attitude becomes more marked. In whatever corner of the globe we find her, she always has the same message for all, the same creed, the same methods, the same worship. The traveller need never inquire in places that are strange to him what kind of church he will find if he hears the Catholic Church is there, for he knows that what he left behind him in his native land he will meet wherever he goes. Her temporal relations may vary, or her political position, or minor points of her ritual, but her internal structure and the truths she teaches are always identical. In one region she may be in the ascendant as representing the national religion, in another she may be in a small minority; in one country she is welcome, in another men are indifferent; but never does she change or trim to the shifting winds of expediency or popularity. This is as indisputably true as it would be hard to find any single organization that preserves its identity in the same marvellous manner.

C. Infallible. The claim of infallibility by the Catholic Church is the cause of most of the bitterness of the invectives that are launched against her. That an institution consisting of human individuals should even dare to claim this position, is as irritating to the age in which we live, as it is certain that no other religious system advances the claim in the same way. That she never admits the possibility of rivalry, and does not suffer her teaching to be believed or not at his will by any individual within her pale; that she never condescends to modify doctrine to suit the private judgment of any individual, is the cause of most of the hard things that have been said against the Church. But it is of the very essence of her position, as we have shown above, that this should be the case. She has to stand alone in the grandeur of her isolation, brave in the strong presumption of her Infallibility, though leaving men unfettered as to the choice they make whether they will accept her claims, and absolutely free as to their opinions on matters outside her jurisdiction. She suffers them to depart if they disbelieve her, but like her Founder she will not alter her truths to suit their opinions or retain their allegiance.* Persecuted, despised, smitten down, all but crushed, never once does she hesitate, or allow that she can err in matters over which she claims the right of dominion; and this because of the basis external to herself on which she claims to rest. And the Catholic Church alone at the present day maintains such a claim as this.

D. Mysterious. That the Catholic Church abounds in mysteries, uses methods above human comprehension, and teaches many things as true that reason is powerless to grasp, is not only part of the accusation of those who find fault with her, but she herself acknowledges that it is the case. She regards such a fact as the necessary accompaniment of her Divine character, and as perfectly natural, if the truths she holds are not the outcome of human opinion, but a divine deposit entrusted to her stewardship. And hence she never lies under any obligation to demonstrate either the possibility or reality of her separate dogmas. Their truth or falsehood stands or falls with the main principle on which she rests, and has not an independent existence apart from herself. She gives no answer to that old question, when first reason felt its littleness in the presence of a Divine Authority, and demanded, "How can these things be done?" † She is but a witness, unshaken and unchangeable to that which cannot be explained, but yet which can be true: she is but the guardian of truth, not the critic. It cannot be denied that if mystery is natural to a Divine Revelation, the Catholic faith is essentially stamped with such a character. We are here only stating the fact, without at present entering into the question of the attitude of mind toward such mysteries.

E. Practical. The Catholic Church is essentially practical, in the sense that she affords definite means, by which the benefits she offers are to be obtained. Whether or not her methods are unreal, useless, or imaginary, is not the point we are now discussing; but whether or not she has a fixed mode of operation, and leaves nothing to mere feeling and inspiration where a want is felt. This was one of the earliest characteristics of the Church manifested, when she was met with the repeated question, which demanded a practical answer, "What shall we do?" ‡ The Church binds the members of her obedience into a life of practical faith with a sevenfold cord. She leaves nothing vague where certainty is most required; she is not merely sentimental, where definite wants demand definite satisfaction.

In the various exigencies of their lives, her members ever know what they are to do, not merely what they are to believe, or feel. And thus the Catholic Church exhibits the wide distinction that there is between an objective and subjective Creed or Faith. She bases none of her operations on the excitement of the hour, and trusts nothing to the emotional waves of feeling, which are as delusive as they are unstable. And if on this ac-

* St. John 6 : 67, 68, 69.

† St. John 3 : 9.

‡ Acts 2 : 37.