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THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION.

(From the Univers.)

When the Sovereign Pontiff, in 1849, desired the French Episcopate to make known to him the mind of the clergy and laity of all their churches on the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God, Mgr. Parisi, the Bishop of Langres, in compliance with the command of His Holiness, addressed an instruction upon this subject to the faithful of his diocese. The series of inductions and proofs which this instruction contains is a complete demonstration of the truth of which it treats, and a refutation of all the old objections now reproduced to assail it. We have not space to give this document entire. The following are its conclusions:—

"We declare aloud, before the Catholic universe, our belief, which we are about to lay at the feet of the Successor of S. Peter, that the immaculate conception of Mary has all the certainty which can belong to a fact not supported by the supernatural authority of the Church, and the proofs of which, though gathered from all Christian authorities, do not exceed the limits of human certainty.

"We declare, then, with S. Anselm, that we hold it to be an undoubted truth that the most chaste body and the most chaste soul of Mary were, from the beginning, placed under the care of the angels, and thus entirely preserved from every stain of sin."

"We believe it firmly, for all the reasons we have already stated, and which, in conclusion, we shall repeat once more. We believe it—

"1. Because, if the hypostatic union excluded all possibility of sin from the Sacred Humanity of Jesus Christ, the Divine maternity by which the Son of God received His life from His holy Mother, preserved Mary from all liability to sin.

"2. Because, as Mary was predestined from all eternity to be the first principle of a new world, and, like the humanity of our Saviour, was only included in the human race under the merciful hypothesis of the Redemption, therefore she was not to be subject to the common law. On this account, God put enmity between her and the devil, whose head she has crushed, and who vainly sought to lay in wait for her heels; wherefore, according to S. Peter Damian, the virginal flesh of Mary was exempt from the sin of Adam, although she was descended from him—*Cara Virginis ex Adam sumpta maculas Adam non admittit.*"

"3. Because tradition has universally favored this blessed belief; the monuments of the Eastern and Latin Churches, the testimony of the Fathers and the words of the Sacred Liturgy, the usages of all the dioceses, and the customs of Religious Orders agree wonderfully with the supreme authority of the Popes in proclaiming Mary to have been pure from her conception. So that this article of belief, although not yet defined to be obligatory, is supported by antiquity, universality, and perpetuity, which are the principal grounds of all dogmas of faith.

"4. Because, when the holy Council of Trent refused expressly to include Mary in the decree of original sin, and renewed the constitutions of Pope Sixtus IV. with regard to the Mother of God, in which he permitted her conception to be termed immaculate in the public offices, the intimate conviction of the Church on this mysterious fact was plainly enough expressed.

"5. Because it is impossible to understand how the Conception of the Blessed Virgin could have been made the subject of a Festival, if it was the only point in which that Divine Mother was not pure; especially since we are not allowed to keep a religious solemnity in honor of what is unholy.

"6. Because it is universally admitted that we cannot extol too highly the holiness of Mary, provided that we do not attribute to her any of the Creator's prerogatives. Now, it is plain that this exceptional latitude granted to our devotion towards the Mother of God would no longer exist had Mary been defiled for one instant by original sin, since the effects of that sin are undeniably more fatal than those of venial sin, the lightest stain of which we should fear to attribute justly to this purest of virgins.

"Lastly, because it was impossible that God, who after the creation of His works pronounced them all to be very good, should, after the creation of the most excellent of all His creatures, have seen in her only a child of wrath.

"Such is our belief—firm, precise, immovable.—There is nothing we hold more certain, after the dogmas of our faith. And now our desire, which is shared by all men of faith, is, that the Holy See, which, with paternal indulgence, granted our former desires by permitting and giving to the faithful a special Office of the Immaculate Conception—will deign, in its supreme wisdom, to take effectual measures that this consoling Office may be unanimously recited throughout the whole Catholic world—that this be-

lief, in which as yet it has pleased God that the desires and hopes of all Christian people should be centered (which as yet is only based on proofs, drawn indeed from the purest sources of Catholic truth, but established only on the authority of human judgment), may be confirmed and expressly defined by the voice of him who was charged by Christ to confirm his brethren. Yes; we desire that this new splendor may be added to thy glory on earth, O blessed Queen!

"We desire it, in the first place, for thy sake; not that our homage can profit thee, but because, loving thee so ardently, our greatest happiness is to see thy perfections more and more made known, thy name revered, and thy worship perfected.

"We desire it most earnestly for ourselves, because, for every new act of praise, which rises to thy throne of power and mercy, we ever receive more ample blessings from thy liberal and maternal hands, and because, in the words of Holy Church, they who celebrate worthily thy holy Conception have a special right to hope for thy assistance.

"Yes; we desire it for ourselves, at this time above all, because of the sufferings and dangers of these calamitous times; for we know that, as the Church declares, thou art the help of Christians, the consoler of the afflicted, the refuge of sinners; and when the tempest grows most furious and the night most dark, we desire to see thee shine with the brightest splendor, O Star of the Sea!

"To thy sacred feet, O incomparable Queen of Heaven and Earth, we presume to bring these desires of our unmistakable veneration and filial piety.

"One who was illustrious among thy servants and admirable among our Doctors, S. Bonaventure, said to thee, O Mary! 'Blessed is the man who is never weary of praising thee! the light of God has risen in his heart, and the Holy Ghost enlightens his understanding.'

"Grant, O glorious Virgin, that, notwithstanding our unworthiness, these holy words may be applied also to our weakness; for we desire to praise thee unceasingly and to hear thy praises for ever.

"Wherefore, our most ardent hopes would be satisfied, if, before the end of our unprofitable life, we might hear the mighty voice of the Church proclaiming throughout the whole universe those words which we love to repeat from the bottom of our heart:—'Hail, O Restorer of a fallen world!—never, never hast thou been stained by any sin!—Salve, O cadentis mundi erectrix!—nulli unquam culpæ subiecta.'"

The same paper publishes the following letter from the learned and pious author of "Études sur le Christianisme"—

"Mr. Editor—It would seem especially unbecoming to discuss any further in the papers the question of the Immaculate Conception, now that it is probably decided by the Church. Peter has spoken, or rather Christ has spoken, by the mouth of Pius IX.—and who shall dare to contradict, or even to support the truth of such a sentence? Nevertheless, out of consideration for the weakness of those who may have been disquieted by the discussion in the *Journal des Débats*, I have thought it expedient to communicate to you two very simple observations, which I think may reassure them. I leave it to your discretion to publish them if you think fit.

"I derive the first from the following judicious passage in the Introduction to the 'History of Catholic Dogmas,' by the Bishop of Grenoble.

"The history of dogma is not properly and exclusively the history of the opinions and personal teaching of the Fathers. For even in matters of faith we may distinguish two characters in the Fathers—that of witnesses or judges of the public doctrine of the Church in their time, and that of private teachers. If, as unanimous witnesses to the tradition of the Church, their authority is undeniable, because in this case their testimony is inseparable from tradition itself—yet as particular doctors they may hold peculiar opinions, and may have an inaccurate and incomplete conception of certain dogmas. And the history of Catholic dogmas in which the doctrine of the Fathers holds so prominent a place, is not a statement of their personal ideas, but of their faith and public teaching. It is not the history of the ideas of great saints and celebrated men, but it is the history of God's revealed truth, under the various forms in which they have clothed it."

"This is my first observation. The second, which seems to me to put an end to all doubt, is that the belief of the Immaculate Conception is so necessarily contained in the fundamental truths of Christianity, that whoever professes the latter implicitly professes the former, and the Church, by her present decree only expresses publicly the belief which existed in the Catholic conscience from the origin of Christianity.

"I read in the Apostles' Creed the two following

articles: that God the Father is Almighty, and that Jesus Christ, his co-equal Son, was born of the Virgin Mary. This is enough to prove to me that the Holy Virgin was preserved from original Sin. When God raised Mary to the dignity of Mother of God, He exerted all his power in exalting her greatness. *Fecit potentiam in brachio suo: fecit militi magna qui potens est.* Common sense agrees with the words of St. Thomas, who says that to make a greater Mother, the Son must have likewise been greater, and that God Himself is, in some sort, the measure of his Mother's greatness. Therefore, if God has exerted all His power in creating this wonderful masterpiece of grace, He has also preserved her from original sin, since to do this it was within the compass of His power. If he did the greater, has he not done the less? He exalted the Most Holy Virgin above all created natures, by her Divine Maternity. Had he not exalted her above mere humanity, by the Immaculate Conception? How could she ever have been subject to the dominion of Satan, who was destined to destroy his dominion, and to whom God Himself vouchsafed to be subject? No, it is not necessary to read and compile so many books. We need but a little good sense, and the remembrance of our *Credo*, to read in the profession of our faith, in the omnipotence of God, and the greatness of Mary, the belief of the Immaculate Conception; a belief which the authority of tradition imposed upon Mahomet, and which the force of truth extorted from Luther.—Accept, Mr. Editor, the expression of my devoted respect.

"A. Nicolas."

Mary was conceived immaculate; this is the faith of the Church: whoever denies it is a heretic? What great things are contained in these words! Before she became our Mother by the bequest of our dying Redeemer, Mary, as the daughter of Adam, was our sister. It was our human nature, therefore, which God was pleased to restore to its original purity, by preserving it in her person, from the guilt of sin which had infected every other child of Adam. Such was God's love for man, so great was his affection for the work of His hands. Before he redeemed it by the blood of His only Son, God was pleased that Heaven should behold upon earth one specimen of that lost innocence, that immaculate humanity, which he had created to reign over all things visible, to love Him and to be loved by Him, and of which in His paternal love, He had said:—"I have made it very good."—*Vidit que Deus cuncta que fecerat; et erant valde bona.* And Mary appeared upon earth according to the expression of Bossuet—"as an incipient Christ," to be at once the source and the image of Him for whom the groaning earth was waiting, and whom the astonished heavens were to behold. He who, to save men, deigned to become like to them in all things except sin, bearing the burden of all their miseries, yet exempt from the infected principle of those miseries; accepting the penalty, but rejecting the defilement of sin; therefore, Mary was preserved from the original stain, and conceived without sin, that from her might be derived a blood pure enough to cleanse the world, that in her we might behold the type of that Creator, once so perfect and so glorious, for whom that blood was to be shed. Such, then, is the deformity and horror of sin, that God was well pleased to accept for Himself and His Blessed Mother all the anguish of the cross which was needful for its destruction; but neither to her nor to Himself would He suffer its defilement to come near. And that this indelible stain, may now be effaced, we cry to Jesus and to Mary. "O, man," said St. Leo, "acknowledge now thine own dignity, and, being sanctified by the grace which associates thee with the Divine nature, sink not again into thine original baseness."

As to the proclamation of the dogma now defined by the plenitude of the Pontifical authority, it would be simply childish folly to raise a question. The dogma is recognised; it exists as it proclaimed at Nice, or in the Upper Chamber at Jerusalem. It has existed from the beginning of the Church, it will exist to the consummation of ages; it is true for the lifetime of the Church, which will last as long as the earth endureth, and shall not perish with it; it is strong as death, for it is compassed about by the blood of martyrs. This is all that can be known, and all that must be said, when we speak of the power given to Peter to silence all contests, to crush all heresies, and to end all revolutions.—Peter arises, he speaks, he commands, he conquers.

SEBASTOPOL—ITS DEFENCES.

In a recent number of the *Paris Constitutionnel*, the *Secrétaire de la Rédaction* of that journal, gives, over his own signature, a semi-official explanation of the terrible nature of the means of defence accumulated by the Russians of Sebastopol, as well as the

grounds upon which the assault by the allies has been deferred.

"History, says our authority, since the invention of artillery, presents us with nothing that will compare in magnitude with the enterprise undertaken by the allies at Sebastopol. For the first time in any warfare, the inventions and improvements of modern art have lent their co-operation to the soldier, rendering practicable operations till now regarded as impossible, and substantially modifying all the essential conditions of the struggle, both in respect to the attack and the defence. The siege of Sebastopol is not only remarkable for the application of new operations in the art of destroying mankind, but also derives from the very position of this stronghold a character altogether peculiar to itself. This it derives from three things: its geographical position, the strength of its garrison, which is equal to the besieging army, and subject to constant accessions, and the fleet and maritime arsenal within its harbor. A large and deep bay, upon which the harbor itself opens, separates the city from the northern hills. It would have required 300,000 men to have invested both shores of this bay. Its southern side having been chosen for good reasons by the allied armies for their point of attack, the northern side is thus left in constant communication with the Russian army, who have possession of the open country.

"A besieging army is usually at least three times as large as the garrison besieged. But at Sebastopol the besiegers and besieged are nearly equal in point of number, while new troops are pouring in to take the place of the disabled and the dead. And it is in this respect especially, that this siege differs from all others in history, that their equipments have never been equal to those of a single rampart. Now, at Sebastopol, besides the regular equipments of its forts, the vessels sunk at the entrance of the channel have set at liberty 15,000 sailors and 2,000 cannon, belonging to the fleet, for service upon the land. With these pieces of artillery every street in the city is now bristling, commanding all the bastions, and enabling the batteries, that are silenced at evening, to be supplied with new pieces of artillery during the night, and to be ready to recommence their fires the next morning. The greatest difference, however, is to be found in the calibre of the artillery. Never before has the air been filled with showers of such immense masses of iron. The ordinary siege balls, of 24, 26, 30 or 36 pounds weight, seem now mere children's toys, in comparison with balls of 50 or 60 pounds weight; with sea cannon carrying balls of from 82 to 150 pounds weight; howitzers of eight and ten inch bore; the Schrapnel shell, enclosing 440 balls, and discharged from cannon known as the Paixhan gun. One of these shells, well aimed, would, destroy an entire battery. In order to meet this iron hailstorm, the allied armies have been compelled to resort to cannon of the same calibre; and these the navy has supplied. In the meanwhile laborers, under the direction of men of the highest military talent, have been mining the earth. These excavations have each day been making constant progress, and had at the last accounts reached a point less than one hundred yards from the Russian bastion known as the *masé*. This point, in all probability, will be selected for the breach and the assault.

"Under all these circumstances which we have enumerated, the immense number and the enormous size of the artillery of Sebastopol modify essentially the condition of its siege. A breach battery, composed of pieces, ranging from 16 to 24 in their capacity, has been planted to silence the artillery of the place, at from 30 to 40 yards distance, where they seek an entrance. This is the rule. But, at Sebastopol there is always cannon in reserve to take the place of each one that is dismounted. To silence their fires is therefore simply impossible. Fortunately the large calibre of the allies' guns permits them from their present position to open a breach, for the Paixhan-guns can batter down wall and entrenchments at that distance.

"The breach made and the moment for the assault having come, never, we may well affirm, did so dangerous a duty devolve upon a chosen soldiery; for the columns of the attack will be exposed to the artillery of the Russian entrenchments, the immense extent of which enables them to concentrate the fires of a fearful range of cannon upon the one hundred yards which the allied columns must cross unprotected, in order to reach the breach. They will have to encounter the fearful discharge from the larger guns, of a new species of projectile, technically called the *rollers*; that is to say, a piece of the capacity of 120, for example, instead of a single mass of iron or a shell, discharges a hundred balls, each of a pound weight, and they are discharged in such a manner, with smaller charges of powder, that upon their touching the ground, they follow all the sinuosities of the surface, bounding along through the space which the columns