



CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

VOL. IV.

MONTREAL, FRIDAY, MARCH 3, 1854.

NO. 29.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE RULE OF FAITH.

(From the *Dublin Review*.)

(CONCLUDED.)

A true rule of faith must be consistent, not only with the maintenance of the faith, but with its propagation. Now the consequence of private judgment is to produce rival creeds, and it is utterly impossible that the heathen should be converted permanently, or on a large scale, by a religion propounded to them in contradictory versions. The sects differ, as we have seen, about matters regarded as essential by the contending parties. Such is the case even in the opposed schools included within the same establishment. To deny the "sacramental system" is heretical in the opinion of High-Churchmen, and to assert it is "soul-destroying" in that of Low-Churchmen. It is impossible, then, that a compromise should be made on such points, and equally impossible that the pagan world should be brought to agree with those who cannot agree among themselves. Again, where no organic principle of unity is recognised, as the source of mission and jurisdiction, it is impossible to prevent the missionaries of rival sects from occupying the same ground. Our Lord's prayer for unity among all that followed Him, a unity which He compares to that subsisting between Himself and His Father, was based upon the desire "that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me;" and the connection between the success of missionary enterprise and unity in the faith and in the Church is obvious. Who can seriously imagine that even if the heathen nations could be evangelized, they could be retained in the faith by a religion consisting only of a doctrine or a sentiment, without a priesthood, an ecclesiastical rule, or a worship uniform and divine? If the Hindoos were converted, could the Christian faith be maintained among them by the principle of private judgment, and a church which pretended to be no more than a great Bible-society? Would this suffice, also, for the Buddhist, the Mahometan, or the African races? It was not thus that Europe was evangelized; nor is it on Protestant principles that even the Protestant missionary maintains whatever scanty success attends his efforts. No sooner has he commenced his labors than he discerns that the Protestant rule of faith can but suit a small portion of the human race under peculiar circumstances. He cannot, however, discard his principles at will, or prevent them from producing their natural results; and accordingly we know, on the authority of Protestant missionaries, that the disputes among Christians are among the chief obstacles to the propagation of the Gospel. A momentary truce, (were it, indeed, possible to attain peace by the sacrifice of truth), could, at most, produce but a momentary good. On the other hand, if the rival missionaries are to co-operate on a common principle, that principle, it is obvious, must be the one upon which alone permanent unity of faith is possible or even conceivable.

A true rule of faith must not only teach us the truth, but secure us from error in matters of faith: in other words, it is necessary to hold the faith, not only in its fulness, but in its purity. Now, whatever truths the rule of private judgment may impart, experience proves that it does not guard us from many errors affirmed on the same authority, and believed with equal confidence. So closely are the truths and errors interwoven, that to remove but one of the latter, is an attempt resisted as a fatal aggression on all the former. Luther's special doctrine of justification, so stoutly repudiated by High-Church Protestants, seemed to him the gospel itself; and the Puritans were as certain with respect to doctrines now denounced by most Protestants, both on moral and social grounds, as with respect to any part of their creed. To confuse truth and error thus, is to plant Babel in the heart of Jerusalem, and to erect false altars in the temple of the true God. Error, in the region of faith, is as poison mixed with food. In the Catholic Church it is hardly possible to confound matters to be believed *de fide* with mere theological opinions on questions not defined; and errors in theological opinions, pretending to be nothing higher than opinion, no more vitiate or undermine the faith than errors on scientific subjects.

A true rule of faith must preserve us from all fatal errors with respect to ordinances as well as to doctrine. Could any isolated individual have discovered from Scripture, as expounded by his own private judgment, that in baptism the sacrament would be made invalid by any form of words, however devout and Christian, which did not include in terms the name of the Holy Trinity? Might not many, though firm believers in the Trinity, have overlooked the necessity of such an invocation at this particular moment? Anglican journals tell us of a parish in which water was for years dispensed with in baptism, only because the font was out of order, and because the clergyman supposed that as affusion represents im-

ersion, so a mere motion of the hand may represent affusion. Is it lawful to mix unconsecrated with the consecrated wine in the Holy Eucharist? Is it, or is it not, competent for laymen to baptize? If so, have they, or have they not, the same power with respect to consecrating the Holy Eucharist? One sort of wine may be substituted for another. Would it be lawful also to substitute water for wine? Or is the admixture of water with wine necessary, as many of the most learned non-jurors maintained, for the due celebration of the Lord's supper? These are questions which can neither be answered by a phrase nor by a sneer. In the sacraments, certain external acts are essential, and others are non-essential. To which class a particular detail is to be referred, private judgment cannot know, with even an approach to certainty, because it has discarded the apostolic precept to "keep the traditions." Yet errors in such matters may be as fatal as error in doctrine or morals; as all persons must admit who believe that two of the sacraments at least are "generally necessary for salvation."

Above all, a rule of faith, if true, must be consistent with the exercise of Faith, and with the harmonious development of the other Christian virtues. In this respect the rule of private judgment is so defective, that if all acted upon it who imagine that to it they owe, under God, their religious knowledge, the very idea of Christian virtue must long since have perished. Private judgment, by engendering contradictory opinions in matters of faith, practically denies at once the objective character of revelation and the certainty of faith. It is, therefore, forced to ascribe to the principle of faith itself deficiencies inherent only in the individual not yet strong in faith, or placed in circumstances under which the exercise of faith is impossible. No sensible man will believe that certainty can belong to doctrines which are the perpetual subject of dispute among the best and ablest men he knows, and all of whom invoke the aid of the same Spirit, while they apply the same rule to the same subject-matter. Common sense can recognise simple facts, in spite of evasion or equivocation; and an appeal as sharp and short as, "what then meaneth this bleating of sheep in mine ears?" will need as a reply, something more than a stereotyped phrase about "agreement in essentials." Confronted by contradictions, yet shrinking from the abyss of conscious infidelity, religious belief declines from certainty to probability; and too often those alone feel positive respecting their conclusions, whose temper makes them equally positive concerning other matters not the subject of revelation at all, as their own individual salvation, or the truth of their political convictions. When faith is changed into opinion, the rock on which the fabric of the Christian life should be reared crumbles into sand. Another and less sincere class of thinkers affirm that they are certain with respect to their conclusions, but that others may be equally certain of opposite conclusions; and that no one has a right to brand his neighbor's opinion as erroneous. This is to substitute taste for probable opinion, and practically to deny, not only the certainty of faith, but the objective existence of Truth itself. Truth upon this theory would be relative, not absolute, like sensations; and Theism and Atheism would stand upon the same level. A third class throw themselves on the inner light of Reason, as the Puritan throws himself on the Spirit, affirming that Reason is a universal endowment incapable of deceiving. But the philosopher of this school cannot deny that revealed religion includes matters of fact, as well as ideas of the pure reason; and again that reason, far from being able to determine as to the former, cannot prove that the truths included in its own province possess an actual as well as an ideal existence. Neither can he shut his eyes to the fact that other persons, possessed of the same universal gift, have arrived at conclusions exactly the opposite of his own; and that his own convictions have also varied, as to the gravest subjects, at different periods of his mature life.—Once more, even though reason were indeed infallible, he must be capable of misusing it; as when a man makes some fatal mistake in casting up a sum in arithmetic. He has, therefore, no means of determining whether it be he or his neighbor who is under delusion. This species of uncertainty, would, in fact, be our condition, even in mathematical science, if its professors arrived at opposite conclusions. In all these schools alike, then, private judgment leads a man in the direction of scepticism, unless he chooses to fling himself into a philosophic fanaticism, and ignore what he knows.

In losing Certainty, Faith loses its essential character, not merely an attribute or an ornament. Divine faith is a theological virtue, and a supernatural gift which enables man to believe and confess with a knowledge, obscure in kind, but absolutely certain, the truth which God has revealed, and on the ground that God has revealed it. The intuitions of reason never could constitute divine faith, because, however

certain they may be, as in mathematics, the faculty is not a supernatural gift infused by the Holy Ghost; and the knowledge it imparts is not accepted on the ground of its being revealed by God. For the same reason the knowledge derived from the senses belongs not to Faith, whether such knowledge be certain or uncertain. Human faith, likewise, another mode of knowledge, being founded on merely human testimony, belongs not to the order of grace, and thus differs essentially from the gift of divine Faith, although it exercises its own subordinate part in sacred things, as well as a principal part in the affairs of ordinary life; holding in the natural order a place in many respects analogous to that which divine Faith occupies in the supernatural. From all these modes of knowledge divine Faith differs; and likewise from that of Vision, which belongs to the kingdom of glory, not to that of grace. Faith comes to us by grace, and with the co-operation both of the human mind and will, to both of which it belongs.—For the exercise of Faith we require two things;—the internal gift itself, and an external guide, either God Himself, or a prophet commissioned by God, and challenging us in His name—a prophet by whom that gift of faith may be directed to its proper objects. It was thus that our Lord stood up among His disciples, and that the Apostles, when the Spirit had descended upon them, at once appealed to, and directed, the faith of the early Christians. They still continue to address us through that Apostolic Church, Catholic, and yet One, in which the unity of the Apostolic College, united ever with Peter, lives and rules. Without the internal grace the external guide would exist in vain; and without that guide the grace must remain dormant. That Church confesses Christ, speaks with His authority, and thus challenges Faith, proposing to it its one appropriate object, viz., the Christian Revelation in its completeness and purity. The whole doctrine is thus held, either explicitly or implicitly; it is held as revealed by God; and it is held by a supernatural Faith, which thus lays the foundation of the supernatural life. Reason does its part, for it vindicates the divine origin and authority of the Church, by means of historic testimony and external evidence, as complete as the nature of such reasoning admits of, and as stringent as that which determines our actions in matters of human duty or interest, where the will is not averse. The rest must be done by Faith, which crowns and authenticates right reason, just as grace consummates nature; and the exercise of Faith is rendered practicable by the presence and challenge of the Apostolic Church, as the divine Witness of a truth delivered once for all, and as its commissioned expositor. We are addressed as reasonable beings; but not as beings for whom reason is sufficient. The divine mission of the Church is evinced to reason by the "Notes" of the Church, as well as by its teaching, its miracles, and the permanent miracle of its sustained existence—just as the mission of the Apostles was evinced by their miracles and by their teaching. It was, of course, always intellectually possible to attribute those miracles to evil spirits or to impostors; and it is equally possible now to meet the claims of the Church by remarking that false Churches have also claimed to speak in God's name. Were such a rejoinder not possible, revelation would be scientifically proved by reason alone, instead of resting on a Faith of which reason supplies the intellectual motives. We thus perceive the fallacious character of that argument which affirms that even an infallible Church would be no certain guide to us, if its claims were not demonstrated by a process of such scientific rigor that no man could resist it.—Equally sophistical is it to urge that if the individual can decide for himself on the claims of the Church, he must also be competent to form his opinions on all other points of theology. As well might we say that whosoever can select a safe guide must have sagacity enough also to find his path across the mountains without a guide. Religion is built upon faith; but faith needs certain conditions for its exercise. It is now as it has ever been. Now, as in the apostolic age, an object is presented upon which Faith, if it exists, is capable of finding a resting-place. The Church comes to us as sent by God. We recognise her claims, humanly by reason, and divinely by faith, because God, who has commissioned her, imparts to us the gift of faith; and thus we can exercise the faculty of spiritual discernment. That the individual should believe as she believes, animated as he is by the same Spirit, no more implies a bondage than that the hand should obey the brain. God gives the faith: the Church, through the Communion of Saints, directs it. The same divine Spirit acts at once in the Church, (which He seals with His holy unction, preserves in unity, and leads into all truth), and in the heart of the individual, which He kindles, illumines, purifies, and delivers from the tyranny of self.

It is not the ultimate uncertainty alone in which an enquiring mind is left by the rule of private judg-

ment, which proves that rule to be inconsistent with Faith. The method it involves for the attainment of knowledge is not that of Faith. For Faith it substitutes the principle of scientific inquiry, directing it, however, to the book of revelation, not that of nature, for its subject-matter. Let us consider this false method on its moral side. As long as we are enquiring, we must keep our minds in a state of judicial impartiality. While, therefore, we are laboring to ascertain whether there are any sacraments or not, and what is the true doctrine of justification, we are all the time exercising on those important questions, the virtue, not of Faith, but of impartiality. Who is to inform the student as to the limits between such enquiry and infidelity? May he not have to enquire also as to the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation? During that enquiry he is a sceptic, not a Christian; and he is little likely to reach the virtue of Faith through the habit of unbelief.

Protestants frequently think that Faith is exclusively the faculty of spiritual discernment, which is but one of its attributes, and not always the one earliest developed. Submission, self-abnegation; these are also qualities implied in the exercise of true Faith. As little children only can we enter into the kingdom of heaven, and as such only can we abide in it, and advance in it. Opinion asserts; Faith confesses; Assertion includes self-assertion. Confession acknowledges God by forgetting self. God only can rightly assert Himself; in man, who is but a Creature, such a habit is based on delusion, and involves the sin of pride, in a form the more perilous for being latent. Pride is the very instinct of Reason, when it works by itself in divine things; and in taking self as a ground of spiritual knowledge, and as our guide to God, man, as it were, creates his own creator. The higher we soar, the more we need humility. For this reason the intuitions of Faith are allowed to remain obscure, though certain; and docility, as well as spiritual discernment, belongs to Faith. Christianity reveals to us the doctrine of a divine sacrifice and a divine condescension; and it is only through this constant discipline of self-sacrifice and self-abasement, in the contemplative, as well as in the practical part of man's being, that such a doctrine can be brought home to his heart and mind.

It is humility that imparts this character to faith; and humility itself is maintained in us by obedience, not to God only, but to man also for God's sake.—The sin of the fallen angels is supposed to have consisted in their refusing to worship God in His Incarnation, when that mystery was prophetically revealed to them; and in men also the trial of humility is to obey one who seems but like oneself, and who yet bears the Divine seal. Docility is always, in Holy Scripture, the attribute of faith. Such docility will often look like credulity; but it is thus that every thing Christian wears a double aspect, as seen by the Christian or by the world. That is no Christianity which escapes its reproach. Those who despise our Lord must despise His Church also, and His servants, who most resemble Him. They class His Church with impostors, because false religions, or corruptions of the patriarchal religion, have also claimed that infallibility which must, as the instinct of the human race ever felt, be an attribute of the true one; and they appeal from it to the Bible, forgetting that the false religions have claimed their sacred books as well as their divine priesthood. It is thus that they class what they fancy the credulity of the Catholic with that of the Hindoo; forgetting that Holy Writ is full of examples of that which might seem credulity, had not Divine Providence and Divine Grace, (the two hands of God in the world,) been pleased thus to co-operate in leading the humble and believing to divine truth. It was thus that the Apostles followed our Lord at a word, and that those who heard them desired that even their shadows might pass over them, and were cured of their diseases.—Credulity itself is but one of the lower forms of human faith. Docility is the imitative form of divine faith. Through it we come to Christ as little children; and, in the Christian, the child lives ever on in the man. The martyrs surely did not lack spiritual discernment; yet none were more remarkable for docility, and the spirit of submission. It was Arius, and the other heretics, who branded their humility as superstition.

The will, as well as the mind, is the seat of faith. To the latter discernment belongs, to the former submission; accordingly that only is heresy which includes the sin of the will; and conversely a belief which does not include the submission of the will is unprofitable, even when it chances to be sound. The authority of the Church is the organ through which Divine grace, shed abroad in the heart, trains man in the habit of submission. Obedience is not a principle merely, to be learned by precept, but a habit to be taught by providential circumstance and divine institutions. It is thus that our moral being, in its own inferior sphere, is shaped and moulded, not by