

ever, have no real foundation in fact. It is true that there was no controversy on the subject till the 12th Century; though, even in the earlier ages, we meet with some remarkable intimations, which plainly show what was the ultimate tendency of the mind of the Church, guided by the illuminating wisdom of the Holy Ghost. Thus St. Ambrose, quite incidentally, speaks of Mary as "a Virgin, through grace, *free from every stain of sin.*"* In like manner, St. Augustine includes all under sin, "*except the holy Virgin Mary*, of whom, for the honor of our Lord, I wish no question at all to be raised, when the subject relates to sin."† In later times, however, we find an overwhelming preponderance of evidence in favor of the general reception of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. The principal Universities of Europe (including those of Oxford and Cambridge) bound their members by a solemn oath to defend it. The most celebrated religious Orders were unanimous in maintaining the same view, though there was a partial exception with respect to the Dominicans, among whom some individual Divines formerly entertained doubts on the subject. Even the scruples of St. Bernard, and St. Thomas, appear to have been rather of a *physical* than of a *theological* nature, while both of them entirely submitted their opinions to the judgment of the Roman Church. The doctrine itself was defined by the Council of Basil in 1439, but this decree was not regarded as binding on the Church, owing to the absence of the Pope and his Legates from that Session. Indeed, it is a curious fact, that Luther himself, even after his separation from the Church, clearly held and taught the doctrine, as appears from one of his Sermons, preached on the Feast of the Con-

* S. Ambros. in Psal. cxviii. Opp. Tom. I. p. 1255. (Ed. Ben.)

† S. August. De Natura et Gratia, c. 42. Opp. Tom. X. p. 144. (Ed. Ben.)