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THE
IMMACULATE CONCEPTION
OF THE
VIRGIN MARY.

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By REV. CHARLES CHINIQUY.



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The 8th December, 1854, the present Pope Pius IX was sitting on his throne; a triple crown of gold and diamonds was on his head; silk and damask—red and white—vestments were on his shoulders; five hundred mitred prelates were surrounding him; and more than fifty thousand people were at his feet, in the incomparable St. Peter's Church of Rome.

After a few minutes of most solemn silence, a Cardinal, dressed with his purpled robe, left his seat, and gravely walked towards the Pope, kneeled before him, and humbly prostrating himself at his feet, said: "Holy Father: tell us if we can believe and teach that the Mother of God, the Holy Virgin Mary, was immaculate in her conception?"

The Supreme Pontiff answered: "I do not know; let us ask the light of the Holy Ghost."

The Cardinal withdrew; the Pope and the numberless multitude fell on their knees; and the harmonious choir sang the "Veni Creator Spiritus."

The last note of the sacred hymn had rolled under the vaults of the Temple, when the same Cardinal left his place, and again advanced towards the throne of the Pontiff, prostrated himself at his feet, and said: "Holy Father, tell us if the Holy Mother of God, the blessed Virgin Mary, was immaculate in her conception."

The Pope answered: "I do not know; let us ask the light of the Holy Ghost."

And, again, the "Veni Creator Spiritus" was sung.

The most solemn silence had, a second time, succeeded to the melodious sacred song, when again the eyes of the multitude were following the grave steps of the purple-robed Cardinal, advancing, for the third time, to the throne of the successor of St. Peter, to ask again: "Holy Father, tell us if we can believe that the blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, was immaculate?"

The Pope, as if he had just received a direct communication from God, answered with a solemn voice: "Yes! we must

believe that the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, was immaculate in her conception. * * * There is no salvation to those who do not believe this dogma !”

And, with a loud voice, the Pope intoned the Te Deum ; the bells of the three hundred churches of Rome rang ; the cannons of the citadel were fired ; the last act of the most ridiculous and sacrilegious comedy the world has ever seen, was over ; the doors of heaven were, for ever, shut against those who would refuse to believe the anti-scriptural doctrine that there is a daughter of Eve who has not inherited the sinful nature of Adam, to whom the Lord said in his wrath : “Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return !” and of the children of whom the God of Truth has said : “There is none righteous ; no, not one ; they have all sinned !”

We look in vain to the first centuries of the Church to find any traces of that human aberration. The first dark clouds which Satan has brought to mar the gospel truth, on that subject, appeared only between the eighth and ninth centuries. But, in the beginning, that error made very slow progress ; those who propagated it, at first, were a few ignorant fanatics, whose names are lost in the night of the dark ages. It is only in the twelfth century that it began to be openly preached by some brainless monks. But, then, it was opposed by the most learned men of the time. We have a very remarkable letter of St. Bernard to refute some monks of Lyons who were preaching this new doctrine.

A little later, Peter Lombard adopted the views of the monks of Lyon, and wrote a book to support that opinion : but he was refuted by St. Thomas Aquinas, who is justly considered, by the Church of Rome, as the best theologian of that time.

After that, the celebrated order of the Franciscans used all their influence to persuade the world that “Mary was immaculate in her conception ;” but they were vigorously opposed and refuted by the not less celebrated order of the Dominicans. These two learned and powerful bodies, during more than a century, attacked each other without mercy on that subject, and filled the world with the noise of their angry disputes, both parties calling their adversaries heretics. They succeeded in driving the Roman Catholics of Europe into two camps of fierce enemies. The “Immaculate Conception” became the subject of burning discussion, not only between the learned universities, between the bishops and the priests and the nuns of those days ; but it divided the families into

swo fiercely contending parties. It was discussed, attacked and defended, not only in the chairs of the universities, in the pulpits of the cathedrals, but also in the fields, in the very streets of the cities. And when the two parties had exhausted the reasons which their ingenuity, their learning, or their ignorant fanaticism could suggest to prove or deny the "Immaculate Conception," they often had recourse to the stick and to the bloody sword to sustain their arguments.

It will appear almost incredible to-day, but it is a fact, the greatest part of the large cities of Europe, particularly in Spain, were then reddened with the blood of the supporters and opponents of that doctrine. In order to put an end to these contests which were troubling the peace of their subjects, the Kings of Europe sent deputation after deputation to the Popes to know from their infallible authority what to believe on the subject.

Philip III and Philip IV made what we may call supreme efforts to force the Popes Paul V, Gregory XV, and Alexander VII, to stop the shedding of blood and disarm the combatants by raising the opinion in favor of the Immaculate Conception to the dignity of a Catholic dogma. But they failed. The only answer they could get from the infallible head of the church of Rome was, that "that dogma was not revealed in the Holy Scriptures, had never been taught by the Apostles, nor by the Fathers, and had never been believed or preached by the Church of Rome as an article of faith!" The only thing the Popes could do to please the supplicant kings and bishops and nations of Europe in those days, was to *forbid* both parties to call the other *heretics*: and to *forbid* to say that it was an article of faith which ought to be believed to be saved.

At the Council of Trent, the Franciscans and all the partisans of the "Immaculate Conception," gathered their strength to have a decree in favor of the new dogma; but the majority of the bishops were visibly against that sacrilegious innovation, and they failed.

It was reserved to the unfortunate Pius IX, to drag the Church of Rome to that last limit of human folly. In the last century, a monk, called Father Leonard, had a dream, in which he heard the Virgin Mary telling him: "That there would be an end to the wars in the world, and to the heresies and schisms in the church, only after a Pope would have obliged, by a decree, all the faithful to believe that she was "immaculate in her conception." That dream, under the

name of "a celestial vision," had been extensively circulated by means of little tracts. Many believed it was a genuine revelation from heaven; and, unfortunately, the good natured but weak-minded Pius IX was among those who believed it. When he was an exile in Gaeta, he had himself a dream, which he took for a vision, on the same subject. He saw the Virgin, who told him that he would come back to Rome, and get an eternal peace for the church, only after he would have promised to declare that the "Immaculate Conception" was a dogma, which every one had to believe to be saved. He awoke from his dream much impressed by it; and the first thing he did when up, was to make a vow to promulgate the new dogma as soon as he would be back to Rome, and the world has seen how he has fulfilled that vow.

But, by the promulgation of this new dogma, Pius IX, far from securing an eternal peace to his church, far from destroying what he is pleased to call the heresies which are attacking Rome on every side, has done more to shake the faith of the Roman Catholics than all their enemies.

By trying to force this new article of faith on the consciences of his people, in a time that so many can judge for themselves, and read the records of past generations, he has taken away and pulled down the strongest column which was supporting the whole fabric of his church; he has forever destroyed the best arguments which the priests had to offer to the ignorant, deluded multitudes which they keep so abjectly tied to their feet.

No word can sufficiently tell the dignified and supreme contempt with which, before that epoch, the priests of Rome were speaking of the "new articles of faith, the novelties of the arch-heretics Luther, Calvin, Knox, &c., &c!" How eloquent were the priests of Rome, before the 8th of December, 1854, when saying to their poor ignorant dupes, "In our holy Church of Rome there is no change, no innovations, no novelties, no new dogmas. We believe to-day just what our fathers believed, and what they have taught us; we belong to the apostolical church, which means that we believe only what Apostles have believed and preached." And the ignorant multitudes were saying, amen!

But, alas, for the poor priests of Rome to-day; those dignified nonsenses, those precious and dear illusions, are impossible! They have to confess that those high-sounding denunciations against what they call the *new* doctrines of the heretics, were nothing but big guns loaded to the mouth to

destroy the Protestants, which are now discharging their deadly missiles against the crumbling walls of their church of Rome. They have to confess that their pretensions to an unchangeable creed is all mere humbug, shameful lies; they have to confess that the church of Rome is "FORGING NEW DOGMAS, NEW ARTICLES OF FAITH;" they do not any longer dare to say to the disciples of the Gospel, "Where was your religion before the days of Luther and Calvin?" for the secret voice of their conscience says to-day to the Roman Catholics, "Where was your religion before the 8th December, 1854?" and they cannot answer.

There is an inexorable and irresistible logic in the minds even of the most unlearned men, which defies, to-day, all the sophisms of the priests of Rome if they dare to speak again on their pet subjects, "the novelties and new dogmas of the Protestants." There is a silent, but crushing voice, going, to-day, from the crowds to the priest, telling him: "Now, be quiet and silent on what you are used to call the novelties and new doctrines of the Protestants! for, are you not preaching to us an awful novelty? Are you not damning us to-day for disbelieving a thing which the church, during eighteen hundred years has, a hundred times, solemnly declared, by the mouth of the Popes, had "never been revealed in the Holy Scriptures, had never been taught by the fathers, had never been heard of by the church herself?"

I will never forget the sadness which overcame me when I received the order from the Pope to proclaim that new dogma to my people, (then all Roman Catholics.) It was as if an earthquake had shaken and destroyed the ground on which my feet were resting. My most cherished illusions about the immutability and the infallibility of my church were crumbling down, in my intelligence, in spite of my efforts to keep them up. I have seen old priests, to whom I opened my mind on that subject, shed tears of sorrow on the injury this new dogma would do to their church.

The Archbishop of Paris, at the head of the most learned members of the clergy of France, had sent his protest to the Pope against this dogma before it was decreed; and he had eloquently foretold the deplorable consequences which would follow that innovation; but their warning voice failed to make any impression on the mind of the infatuated Pope.

And, we children of God, must we not acknowledge the hand of the Lord, in that blindness of "the man of sin!"

The days are not far away that a cry of joy will be heard from one end to the other of the world: "Fear God, and give glory to Him! Babylon is fallen! Babylon is fallen! because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornications."

For, when we see that "wicked one, who exalteth himself above all that is called God," destroying himself by the excess of his own folly and impieties, we must bless the Lord.

The proclamation of this new dogma is one of those great moral iniquities which carry their punishment and their remedy in their own hands.

When the Pope, in the morning of the 8th December, 1854, answered twice: "I do not know" to the question put to him, "Is the Virgin Mary Immaculate in her Conception?" and then, a minute after, to the same question, he answered: "Yes! I know it; the Holy Virgin Mary was immaculate in her Conception," he proved to his most credulous dupes that he was nothing but a miserable sacrilegious comedian. How would a jury of honest men deal with a witness who, being interrogated about what he knows of a certain fact, would answer, "I know nothing about it;" and a moment after would acknowledge that "he knows everything about it." Would not such a witness be justly punished as a perjurer?

Such is the sad and unenviable position which the Pope has made to himself and to his church, the 8th of December, 1854. Interrogated by the nations of Europe about what was to be believed on the "conception of the Virgin Mary," the church of Rome, during ten centuries, had answered: "I do not know." And let every one remember that she wants to be believed "INFALLIBLE" when she says she "knows nothing about the Immaculate Conception."

But, to-day, that same church assures us, through the infallible decree of Pius IX, that she knows, and she has *always* known and believed the Virgin Mary was Immaculate!

Has the world ever seen such a want of self-respect, such an unblushing impudence!

What verdict will the Christian world give against that great mother of lies? What punishment will the God of truth administer to that great culprit who swears "yes" and "no" on the same fact?

It is a fact that by the promulgation of this decree, Pius IX has forever destroyed his prestige in the minds of millions of his followers.

A few days after I had read to my congregation the decree

of the Pope proclaiming this new dogma, and damning all those who would not believe it, one of my most intelligent and respectable farmers came to visit me, and put to me the following questions on the new articles of faith :

"Mr. Chiniquy, please tell me, have I correctly understood the letter from the Pope you read us last Sabbath? Does the Pope tell us in that letter that we can find this new dogma of the 'Immaculate Conception' in the Holy Scriptures, that it has been taught by the fathers, and that the Church has constantly believed it from the days of the Apostles?"

I answered: "Yes, my friend, the Pope tells us all those things in his letter which I read in the Church last Sabbath."

"But, sir, will you be so kind as to read to me the verses of the Holy Scriptures which are in favor of the Immaculate Conception of the Holy Virgin Mary?"

"My dear friend, I answered, I am sorry to say that I have never found, in the Holy Scripture, a single word to tell us that Mary is immaculate; but I have found many words, and very clear words, which say the very contrary thing. For instance, the Holy Ghost, in the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans, v. 18. By the *offense of one*, judgment came upon *all* men to condemnation." This little but inexorable "ALL" includes the Virgin Mary in the condemnation and in the guilt. In the same Epistle to the Romans, chap. III, v. 22, 23, the Holy Ghost, speaking of the children of Adam—Israelites and Gentiles—says there is no difference, they have ALL sinned and come short of the glory of God! and in the verse 10 of the same chapter, the Holy Ghost, speaking of the Jews and Gentiles, says: "There is none righteous—no, not one!" And the Lord has never repealed in any part that I know of the Holy Scriptures, this awful "no—not one!"

"Now, please tell me the name of the Holy Fathers who have preached that we must believe in the Immaculate Conception, or be forever damned, if we do not believe in it?"

I answered to my parishioner: "I would have preferred, my dear friend, that you should have never come to put to me these questions; but as you ask me for the truth, I must tell you the truth. I have studied the fathers with a pretty good attention, but I have not yet found a single one of them who was of that opinion in any way."

"I hope," added the good farmer, "you will excuse me if I put to you another question on this subject. Perhaps you do not know it, but there is a great deal of feeling and talking about this new article of faith among us since last Sabbath;

I want to know a little more about it. The Pope says in his letter that the Church of Rome has always believed and taught that dogma of the immaculate conception. Is that correct?"

"Yes, my friend, the Pope says that in his Encyclical; but these last nine hundred years more than one hundred Popes have declared that the Church had never believed it. Even several Popes have forbidden to say 'that the immaculate conception was an article of faith'—and they solemnly permitted to believe and say what we please on that matter."

"If it be so with this new dogma, how can we know that it was not so with the other dogmas of our Church, as the confession, the purgatory," &c., added the good farmer.

"My dear friend, do not allow the devil to shake your faith. We are living in bad days indeed. Let us pray God to enlighten and save us. I would have given much had you never put to me these questions.

My honest parishioner had left me; but his awful questions, (they were really awful, as they are still awful for a priest of Rome,) and the answers I had been forced to give, were sounding in my soul as thunder-claps. There was in my poor trembling heart, as the awful noise of an irresistible storm, which was to destroy all that I had so dearly cherished and respected in my then so dear and venerated Church of Rome. My head was aching. I fell on my knees; but for a time I could not utter a word of prayer: big tears were rolling on my burning cheeks; new light was coming before the eyes of my soul; but I took it for the deceitful temptation of Satan; a voice was speaking to me; it was the voice of my God telling me, "Come out from Babylon! come out from Babylon!" But I took that voice for the voice of Satan; I was trying to silence it. The Lord was then drawing me away from my perishing ways; but I did not know him then; I was struggling against Him to remain in the dark dungeons of error. But God was to be the stronger. In his infinite mercy He was to overpower His unfaithful servant. He was to conquer me, and with me many others.

May all the nations bless and praise Him for His mercies!

Not long after that, in a single day, more than one thousand of my dear countrymen broke with me the chains of the spiritual and abject slavery which had bound us to the feet of the man of sin; and we took Jesus, the eternal Son of God, for our only way, our only light, our only life!

C. CHINIQUY.