

FAITH OF OUR FATHERS

[A WEEKLY INSTRUCTION FOR YOUNG AND OLD.]

43. Let us pass from the question of right to that of fact.

What has always been the legislation and the conduct of that Church which has been so much accused of intolerance?

Faithful to the command of Jesus Christ, the Church has ever been content with *preaching the Gospel*; that is to say, she has always acted by means of persuasion, without employing any violence. She has never persecuted; but in all times and in all ages, like her Divine Master, she has suffered persecution. With regard to her own rebellious or straying children, when she has judged it expedient to punish them, she has always done it with a maternal hand, in order to bring them back to a sense of duty and to remove scandal. On every page of impartial history this is shown. If, under certain circumstances and through an excess of zeal, Christian princes have used harsh and rigorous means to convert unbelievers or sectarians, they have, in doing so, followed their own personal impulses and not the rules of the Church, which cannot therefore be held responsible for their acts. The Inquisition, which was established by the Pope, does not, as we shall hereafter show, prove anything to the contrary.

44. Besides the distinction between *dogmatic* and *civil* intolerance, which we have just been explaining, there is another kind of intolerance, which means almost the same thing. There is intolerance of *doctrines* and *principles*, and intolerance of *persons*. The Church is always full of indulgence for persons. She is only intolerant of evil doctrines and erroneous principles, just as she is intolerant of vice, though full of mercy for the men who are its slaves. She follows the example of Almighty God, who hates sin, but receives sinners with bounty and compassion.

II. The Inquisition.

45. The Inquisition is said loudly to proclaim the intolerance of the Church; it is an historical monument of the violence and cruelty exercised by the Catholic clergy to coerce men's consciences.

The Inquisition has been much talked of; it has been laid to the Church's charge as something monstrous, for which she is accountable. But have these grave accusations any foundation? Is there any proof of the truth of these allegations? Are the facts of the case rightly appreciated or understood? Are not those abuses even which are condemned by the Church considered as the natural fruits of her principles and institutions? What is the truth in all this confusion? The truth is:

46. That what is called the Inquisition consisted of a court of justice, which was at the same time ecclesiastical and civil. It was established to take cognisance of the crime of heresy, and to punish the guilty. The tribunal of the Inquisition was called the "Holy Office."

About the year 1200 it was instituted by Pope Innocent III. in order to repress the Albigenses and the Vaudois. As these sects spread together with their errors a spirit of rebellion against the two authorities, instruction and persuasion were at first tried, in order to reclaim them to a sense of duty; but when these means were found to be ineffectual, the ecclesiastical and the civil powers, being equally menaced, united against their common enemy; the former lent its authority to discover crime, and the latter to punish it. Hence the origin of the Inquisition.

The Roman and Ecclesiastical Inquisition must be distinguished from what is properly so-called the Spanish Inquisition.

47. (1) The Ecclesiastical Inquisition, regarded from the point of view of right, was a wise and just institution, in harmony with the principles by which society was then governed; and from the point of view of facts, it was a tribunal of reconciliation rather than of severity. No tribunal ever acted with more gentleness. We have a proof of this in the celebrated trial of the Knight Templars, who requested as a favour to be tried by the Inquisition rather than by any other tribunal.

48. (2) The Spanish Inquisition.—The Inquisition established in Spain in the twelfth century was adopted as a State institution by Ferdinand and Isabella in 1481. From that time it was more a royal than an ecclesiastical tribunal, all the members of which, whether priests or laymen, were nominated by the sovereign and withdrawn from the authority of the Church. In the hands of the kings of Spain it was an instrument employed for the triumph of the Christian Faith, and at the same time of the Spanish nation, over the conspiracies of the Jews and Moors. The Spanish Inquisition is not, therefore, the work of the Church. The Popes have even disavowed it, by protesting against the usurpation of their rights, and against the severity of some of the inquisitors. We conclude, therefore, that if in Spain abuses had crept in, that is no reason for criminating the Church.

49. Neither is it a reason why the institution in itself should be absolutely condemned. Thanks to this tribunal, Spain has escaped the horrors of religious warfare, which have deluged Europe with blood, and she has greatly contributed towards saving the interests of Catholicism elsewhere.

Moreover, these abuses are represented as having been far greater than they were in reality. The Spanish Inquisition did not tear men away from the faith of their fathers like the English Inquisition and that which was practised by heretics in other parts; nor did it tyrannise over unbaptised heretics. It exercised its authority over apostates and renegades from the Faith, particularly over the Jews and Moors, who, though to all appearances converted, were plotting in secret against the Church and the State. The jurisdiction of the "Holy Office" was limited to the declaration of the guilt or innocence of the accused, and the penalties which were imposed by another tribunal were according to the criminal code of the country. The number, as well as the rigor, of the chastisements of these so-called "victims of the Inquisition" has been very greatly exaggerated. The prisons of the Inquisition were more salubrious than any others, and the *auto-da-fé** frequently gave rise to edifying scenes of retraction and of repentance.

Nothing of what occurred in Spain could compare with the massacres and persecutions of the Catholics by the Protestants of France, Germany, Holland, and, above all, of England. The executions under Henry VIII. may be counted by hundreds, and those under Elizabeth can hardly be numbered. "This sanguinary queen," says Cobbett, "put to death more persons in one year than the Inquisition did during the whole of its duration."

*This word signifies "act of faith." The name was given to the public ceremony during which the sentences were pronounced and the penalties endured which were imposed by the Inquisition.

IRELAND THE UNKNOWN.

Thou whom ten thousand searchlights leave obscure;
The white foam's sister, as the white foam pure;
The dark storm's daughter, guarding long and late
That far-descending heirloom, ancient hate:—
I cannot say: "In all things that concerned
Thee and thy hopes I never swerved or turned,
Or held with stumbling mind a wavering creed,"
But this at least I can declare indeed:
Through days with tempest packed, with thunder piled,
My dream is of an Ireland Reconciled;
Not mocked and thwarted, conquering some vain goal
That only baulks the hunger of the soul;
Not still uncheered, and in fierce mood unchanged,
The spouse whom wedlock hath the more estranged,
Whom bonds have the more direly wrenched apart;
But after that long solitude of heart,
And all the dissonance of the loveless Past,
An Ireland willing to be loved at last;
An Ireland healed with a more sovereign balm
Than the old deep hurts have known, and in blessed calm
Risen from a hundred shatterings, great and new,
O that the dream might even now come true!

—SIR WILLIAM WATSON, in the *London Times*.

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