

IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

THE Catholic Church in her head, Pope Pius IX, in the year 1854, formally and definitively declared, "That the teaching which holds that the Blessed Virgin Mary was by a singular grace and privilege of Almighty God, in virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the human race, preserved free from every taint of original sin, at the first moment of her conception, has been revealed by God, and is therefore strongly and constantly to be believed by all the faithful." To the Catholic, these infallible words of Christ's Vicar on earth are indeed sufficient. But how shall we, whose duty it is to spread the light of God's truth among men, show the fitness of this singular honor to those outside the fold? To those who regard Catholics' love and reverence of Christ's pure mother as a matter of superstition? It is true we cannot give proofs either from Scripture or tradition which will prove absolutely this doctrine. But we can show that this doctrine is contained implicitly in Sacred Scripture and in the teachings of the Fathers.

Let us then first direct our attention to the inspired Word of God. There we find two texts which seem to contain the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. The first is taken from the Book of Genesis, iii, 15: "I will put enmities between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed: she shall crush thy head, and thou shall lie in wait for her heel." In these words, the purity and sinlessness of Mary the woman is foretold. It is she who, by her freedom from sin, is to crush the head of the serpent; the one who, by his deceits, has caused the fall of the human race. She alone of all creatures was to be worthy to bear the Eternal God within her sacred womb and give birth to Him

who, by His sufferings and death, would free man from the servitude of the devil. She, the new Eve, was to obtain a complete and absolute victory over the archenemy of the fallen race. How, then, could it be that there was ever in Mary the slightest sin? For how could Mary's victory be complete if the devil could say of her: "She also was under my dominion at least at the moment of her conception?"

Again, in the New Testament, Luke i, 25, in the recorded words of the Archangel Gabriel, we read of the plenitude of grace that is bestowed on Mary. She alone by virtue of her exalted vocation was exempt from sin, even from the universal law of original sin and received a superabundance and fulness of God's grace. God exalted her above His great prophet Jeremias and His own precursor, John the Baptist, to whom was granted the privilege of purification from sin while still in the womb. Was not the Archangel's salutation, "Hail, full of grace?" Moreover, that Mary might enjoy this plenitude of grace, she must of necessity have been free not only from actual sin but also from the stain of original sin. It is incompatible and impossible that there should have existed in Mary this superabundance of grace if at any time her soul had been tainted with the guilt of original sin. Mary then, according to the words of the Archangel Gabriel, was preserved from original sin and received the fulness of grace.

In the absence of absolute proofs of the Immaculate Conception in Holy Scripture, let us consider the teachings of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church in regard to this dogma. Here we shall find our strongest and most cogent proofs. For they are the true exponents of the doctrines entrusted by Christ to His Holy Church.

Among the writings of the early Fathers there are many texts in support of this great prerogative of Mary. Saint Augustine, in his commentary on the Book of Genesis, says: "As the devil was the head from whence original sin proceeded, that head Mary crushed, because no sin entered the soul of the Virgin and therefore she was free from all stain." And again he says: "In Thee, O Lord, there is no stain and Thy Mother is without spot." Saint Ephrem, when speaking of Mary, likens her to the first Eve: "The one the cause of our death, the other the cause of our life." He also writes: "The Virgin Mary was not defiled by any blemish of sin."

It is true that in the Western Church between the twelfth and four-

teenth centuries many illustrious theologians hesitated in giving Mary this great privilege; but their hesitancy can be easily explained in view of the conditions of the times and their strict conception of the universality of original sin. Indeed, it was not then so clearly seen how Mary, although falling under the law, was through the passion and death of the Redeemer, preserved free from the stain of original sin. But with the removal of this difficulty of the universality of original sin, by the learned Franciscan, Duns Scotus, and with the ever increasing demands of the people, giving evidence of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the question was forever set at rest by the memorable decree of Pope Pius IX.

—Bertrand Gorman, O. P.

A GREAT DOMINICAN

SHORTLY after the close of the Civil War, while the Dominican Sisters were laying the foundation of their noble educational apostolate at New Orleans there was born in Spain a child destined to accomplish in the humble work of the zealous parish priest, results quite as glorious for the Dominican Order and beneficial for the spiritual welfare of the Church in Louisiana, as those which have been achieved by the self-sacrificing labors of the daughters of Saint Dominic themselves.

Thomas Lorente, for this was the child's name, was born in Puebla de Higar, of the Archdiocese of Saragossa, Spain, of noble Spanish parents, on the 18th of September, 1868.

Endowed with rich qualities of mind and heart beyond any but the most gifted children, Thomas early distinguished himself in study and eagerly imbibed the spirit of fervent Catholic

piety which permeated the Lorente family life. He showed from his tenderest years the sure signs of a priestly vocation by his attachment to the devotions of the Most Blessed Sacrament and of the Blessed Mother. At the early age of sixteen, he entered the Dominican Order, feeling that among the chivalrous sons of de Guzman his ideals of the priesthood could be realized to their fullest extent.

On the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, 1884, he was invested with the habit of Saint Dominic, the white of which reflected the innocence and purity of his youthful soul.

Having taken the first step in his religious career, he now entered upon the year of novitiate, which is enjoined by Holy Mother Church as a preparation for the profession of the three vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. During this year he devoted himself to exercises of prayer and mortifi-