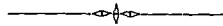


their legitimate aspirations, and we cannot meet the wishes of both without sacrificing the interests of the community. His third point is that perpetual widowhood is from economic reasons the fate of the widow; the State should interfere and forbid the remarriage of the widower. It appears that in the Rajput Reform Association widowers above the age of fifty are bound down by their caste rules not "to make fools of themselves by repairing a second time to the altar of Hymen." This in his opinion is an encouraging sign of the times. It certainly will increase the number of old maids, and be a check on the increase of the population.

ROBERT CUST.



ART. VI.—THE ARGUMENT OF THE "*AURIUM PIETAS*": ITS USE AND ABUSE.

THE freedom, not always reverent, with which recent criticism has been applied to the deepest and most sacred mysteries of our faith, cannot but bring to our mind the principle of the *aurium pietas* as it was recognised in earlier ages, and is still maintained in the Roman Church; though its meaning has by modern controversialists of that Church been extended to doctrinal developments instead of being limited to the reverent and pious treatment of the mysteries of the faith as "once delivered." We may observe, first, that this kind of argument has no connection whatever with the practice of the *disciplina arcani*, in which, by a conventional agreement between Christians, the true nature of the elements of the Eucharist was concealed from the uninitiated, a practice as inconsistent with the Divine command, which required the Passover rite to be explained even to the youngest who were capable of understanding it, as it is to the openness and sincerity which the principles of Christianity require in regard to all its institutions. This conversion of the Christian Passover into a "mystery," never to be alluded to but in dark figures of speech or parables, was one of the many causes of the animosity of the heathen, and of their charges against Christians, as though they partook of some unhallowed and revolting feast, instead of celebrating a simple and beautiful memorial, real rather in its effects upon the heart and life than in its own inherent power. With this conventional practice the principle of the *aurium pietas* has no affinity.

This latter rather represented the spirit of reverence and of pious reticence with which those great mysteries of our faith which stand around the supreme truth of the Incarnation, or any of their consequences, were approached by the faithful in

an earlier age, and offers an important lesson to those of our own who are too apt to approach them with other feelings and dispositions, and to treat them as ordinary subjects of critical investigation and of ingenious speculation and conjecture.

It is thus that the greatest of the mysteries of the Incarnation, the apparent conflict of attributes, arising out of the union of the two natures in Christ, has been recently treated, and the limits of that mysterious union been defined and, as it were, mapped out, a course as inconsistent with the piety of the more advanced disciple as it is injurious to the faith of the weaker one, who accepts the cardinal truth of his religion with all its mysteries, and finds in the practical application of it their best solution.

Perhaps the earliest direct assertion of the principle of the *aurium pietas*, and certainly the most influential in its later history, is the passage of St. Augustine (De Nat. et Gratiâ, c. 42): "Except the blessed Virgin Mary, regarding whom, on account of the honour of the Lord, I wish to enter into no question when we make mention of sin (for how do we know what amount of grace was given her to overcome sin in every case, who was thought worthy of conceiving and bearing Him whom we know to have had no sin?)—except this Virgin, if we could collect together all holy men and women and ask them whether they were without sin, would not they cry out with one voice, 'If we say that we have no sin we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us?'" It appears, however, that the assertion of the sinlessness of the Blessed Virgin originated with Pelagius himself, who insisted upon it in the case of all the saints of the Old Testament, as well as of the Virgin Mary. St. Augustine, in his reply, does not absolutely assert it, as his adversary had done, but merely shelters himself under the *aurium pietas*. He does not like to think of sin in connection with one from whom the Sinless One was in His human nature derived. The Roman defenders of the "Immaculate Conception" have followed in their contention rather the dogmatical assertion of Pelagius than the pious reticence of St. Augustine. The words of the latter, which have been forced into their service, cannot by the most strained interpretation mean more than that, though unwilling, like Pelagius, to declare the sinlessness of the Virgin, he is yet from a natural feeling of piety, arising out of her singular prerogative as the mother of our Lord, unwilling to think of her in connection with sin.

In a more limited sense, and in the case of all the departed saints of God, we share in some degree this feeling. We cannot bear to dwell on their errors and faults; we prefer to read panegyrics of their virtues rather than severe judgments on

their failures. But this sentiment does not lead us to pronounce them either actually or comparatively perfect. Our silence is rather the offering of piety than the assertion of faith. The "grace given her to overcome sin" cannot refer to original sin, which could not be thus resisted by grace, so that, even if taken as a declaration of sinlessness, it cannot be received as covering original as well as actual sin.

We come next to the remarkable passage in St. Epiphanius, which exhibits the *aurium pietas* in a new form, but still in connection with the Blessed Virgin. Arguing against the heretics, who depreciated the dignity of the Virgin (whom he terms Antidicomarianæ), he endeavours to trace her history, after her commendation to St. John and residence with him. Finding no mention of her in the after-life of John, he is betrayed into a wild kind of reverie in regard to her future history. In this, by a curious application to her of Rev. xii. 13, he begins to doubt her death: "I do not altogether determine this matter, and say not whether she remained immortal, nor yet do I establish the fact of her death. For Scripture transcending herein, the human mind has left the matter uncertain, on account of that venerable and exalted vessel, and has not ascribed to her any carnal relation. Whether she is dead or buried we know not; in any case she had no union with flesh."¹

This strange passage must be read in strict subordination to the object the writer had in view, which was to denounce as impious the belief that the Virgin had any other children. Instead, however, of establishing the truth of the perpetual virginity, it formed the foundation of the legend of the Assumption, which grew up into a doctrine in the Eastern Church, and passed thence into the Western. Epiphanius' chief argument is derived from the *aurium pietas*. He proceeds to denounce, in his usual embittered language, the impiety of those who hold the contrary doctrine, and his reference to Rev. xii. 13 is designed to prove that the Virgin—like the woman who brought forth the man child—was hidden in the wilderness from the wrath of the dragon. At a later period, when the whole of this chapter was transferred to the Virgin, and the old interpretation, which referred it to the Church, was entirely superseded, the "hiding of the woman in the wilderness" was made the foundation of the Assumption legend, and the belief that, like Moses, her body was not found upon earth, led to the idea that she was translated, like Elijah, to heaven. This wild improvisation of history is perhaps the greatest instance in all antiquity of the abuse of the principle

¹ Hæres, 78, cap. 11.

of the *aurium pietas*, and the inevitable danger into which it leads.

Its introduction as a theological argument instead of a mere restraint of speculative pious opinion must be attributed to Scotus and his followers, by whom the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception was first put forth before the world. Destitute as that dogma was of Scriptural, synodical or patristic authority—for never was a *consensus* on any doctrine of the Church so universal as that which we find against this—it formed the strongest argument of the Immaculists, and as it appealed to the imagination rather than to the judgment, to the feelings rather than to the understanding, it has been the only real foundation of that most indefensible doctrine from the day of its first discovery by Scotus, until it was promulgated as a doctrine of necessary faith by the late Pope in the Bull *Ineffabilis*.

The Dominicans boldly resisted this application of the principle to the doctrine they so vigorously and (as far as argument can effect) so successfully repudiated. Foremost in this opposition was the great Cardinal Cajetan, to whom the question was referred for solution in the Lateran Council by Leo X. "This root," he writes, "is supported by zeal, but not according to knowledge. For it would lead away from the faith to many devious paths. According to this so-called rule of piety, we might believe to-morrow that the Virgin was conceived by the Holy Ghost, and yet under Christ. . . . We might believe that she was God and man, and yet under Christ. . . . And many other similar erroneous things might be deduced from such a kind of piety" ("De Concept.").¹ Such was the protest of the cardinal, or, rather, of Leo X. himself, and of the Lateran Council, to which it was addressed. But Pius IX. entertained no such reasonable views or prudential considerations. He boldly pronounces—not what God *has* done or *has* revealed—but what He ought to do and reveal. "*Decebat*," "*prorsus decebat*" are his words of dictation to the Almighty; and as he could not find the doctrine in the Scriptures, it was enough for him to determine that it ought to have found a place in them. That this is a flagrant instance of the abuse of the principle of the *aurium pietas* must be clear to everyone whose eyesight is not suffused by the belief in the papal infallibility, which ought, in point of time, to have preceded the Bull *Ineffabilis*, rather than to have succeeded it. For it supplied a much better reason for the reception of the new dogma than any of those alleged by the Pope, in which history and tradition are falsified almost in every sentence.

¹ De Concept. B. Virginis, Opusc., tom. ii., tract. l., c. v.

But as we have given a few instances of the misapplication of the principle in question, we may well pass on to consider how far it can be legitimately applied for the protection of the great truths which all Christians hold in common. Though the principle itself finds no place in the creed or in the outward evidences of Christianity, it must have a place in every well-regulated and religious mind, as constituting the greatest moral support of the mysteries of our faith, the strongest outpost of their defence in every pious heart. The great mystery of the Incarnation in all its features of beauty and wonder needs not only our faith and admiration, but our silent and reverent adoration. When we accept it, we accept with it all those ineffable mysteries and difficulties of reconciliation which it involves, nor are we called upon to draw lines of definition or distinction between the human and the Divine nature, whose union is beyond the scrutiny even of the angels who ministered to it. So long as we preserve the reality of the human nature of our Lord, and save our faith from so crushing out the humanity as to leave it no place or function in the Divine system, which is the fatal error of the Monophysites, and, on the other hand, escape the perils of Arianism, which would do equal injury to the Divine nature of our Lord, we are not called upon to draw lines of distinction or rules of limitation in regard to this supreme doctrine.

The mystery of the Incarnation is best cleared up in its practical application. The three great portions of the creed are best learned and reconciled in the life of the disciple. The principle of the *aurium pietas*, applied so as to preserve the reverence and the reticence which belong so inseparably to a subject which, seen nakedly and merely externally, would rather lead to a captious criticism and to the ever-recurring question, "How can these things be?" will thus become a shelter and protection even to the weakest faith, and an indispensable safeguard during the storms of controversy and the wild excesses of criticism which must fill every heart with anxiety, and threaten the fulfilment in a spiritual sense of our Lord's prophecy that the "powers of the heavens shall be shaken."

The question of the knowledge of our Lord and of its limitations in regard to His human nature is one of those in which the principle for which we are contending ought to be anxiously kept in view. On only one occasion (St. Mark xiii. 32), in regard to the day of final judgment, our Lord set a limit to His knowledge as the Son. On only one occasion does He distinctly declare the authorship of a particular Psalm, and assign it to David, for His general references to the Book of the Psalms do not fix the authorship of the entire collec-

tion. The references to Isaiah may relate to the second prophet of the name—the "Isaiah of the Captivity," as modern Jews designate him—or to the great prophet of the reign of Hezekiah. No serious difficulty can present itself to the pious reader in a case like this.

Nor can the adaptation of our Lord's language to the popular ideas of those whom He was addressing be regarded as indicating any limits to His Divine knowledge. "*Cristo non venne al mondo per insegnare geografia,*" as Bishop Pannilini affirmed in the assembly of Tuscan bishops at Florence in reference to Pope Zachary's decree against the antipodes and the condemnation of Galileo.

Next to the great central truth of Christianity, and gathered round it as outposts of the citadel of our faith, are all those subordinate truths which are so long and unnecessarily being made the subjects of bitter contention and controversy—the authority and structure of the Word of God—the place of the sacraments in the Divine system, the office of the prophets and saints of the former and later covenant, and the degree of reverence to be assigned to them. Here the principle of the *aurium pietas* may well find recognition in the religious mind.

Finally, let us remember that the spirit in which we approach religious subjects is the true measure of our qualification for entering upon their study and examination. The Word of God can only become fruitful in the "honest and good heart." These words propose to us a moral qualification which too many of the critical explorers of a later day make no effort to acquire. And the result of their elaborate researches and unrivalled ingenuity presents a very Babel of tongues, conclusions which are constantly superseding one another, and proving "the diviners mad, turning the wise men backward, and making their knowledge foolish." The *aurium pietas* of the faithful and less learned disciple is thus offended and scandalized, the search after Divine truth is reduced to mere prying of an earthly and unholy curiosity. Well may we strive to live in the spirit, while we utter the words of that comprehensive prayer: "Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity, and quicken Thou me in Thy way" (Ps. cxix. 37). We cannot live on the husks of ever-changing theories; in the hunger of our souls we need the "bread of life" to quicken us.

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