

the knowledge of which is necessary in order to an accurate acquaintance with the way of salvation.

Sec. III.—Conversion—Sovereign and Efficacious Grace.

The controversy between Augustine and his opponents turned, as we have said, to a large extent, upon the nature and import, the necessity, grounds, and results of that grace of God, which, in *some sense*, was universally admitted to be manifested in preparing men for heaven. That a certain character, and a certain mode of acting, in obedience to God's law, were in fact necessary, in order to men's attaining final happiness, and that men were in some sense indebted to God's grace or favour for realizing this, was universally conceded. It was conceded by Pelagius and his immediate followers, and it is conceded by modern Socinians; but then the explanation which these parties gave of this grace of God, which they professed to admit, made grace to be no grace, and practically made men, and not God, the authors of their own salvation, which the Socinians, consistently enough, guarantee at length to all men. With the original Pelagians and the modern Socinians, the grace of God, by which men are, in this life, led to that mode of acting which, in fact, stands connected with their welfare in the next,—(for even Socinians commonly admit some punishment of wicked men in the future world, though they regard it as only temporary),—consists in these two things: First, the powers and capacities with which He has endowed man's nature, and which are possessed by all men as they come into the world, along with that general assistance which He gives in His ordinary providence, in upholding and aiding them in their own exercise and improvement of these powers and capacities; and, secondly, in the revelation which He has given them to guide and direct them, and in the providential circumstances in which He may have placed them. This view of the grace of God, of course, assumes the non-existence of any such moral corruption attaching to men, as implies any inability on their part, in any sense, to obey the will of God, or to do what He requires of them; and, in accordance with this view of what man is and can do, ascribes to him a power of doing by his own strength, and without any special supernatural, divine assistance, all that is necessary for his ultimate welfare. This view is too flatly contradictory to the

plain statements of Scripture, and especially to what we are told there concerning the agency of the Holy Ghost, to have been ever very generally admitted by men who professed to receive the Bible as the word of God; and, accordingly, there has been a pretty general recognition of the necessity, in addition to whatever powers or capacities God may have given to men, and whatever aids or facilities of an external or objective kind He may have afforded them, of a subjective work upon them through special supernatural agency; and the question, whether particular individuals or bodies of men were involved more or less in the errors of semi-Pelagianism, or taught the true doctrine of Scripture, is, in part, to be determined by the views which they have maintained concerning the nature, character, and results of this special supernatural agency of God, in fitting men for the enjoyment of His own presence.

Even the original Pelagians admitted the existence of supernatural gracious influences exerted by God upon men; but then they denied that they were *necessary* in order to the production of any of those things which accompany salvation, and held that when bestowed they merely enabled men to attain them more easily than they could have done without them; while they also explicitly taught that men *merited* them, or received them, as the meritorious reward of their previous improvement of their own natural powers. An assertion of the *necessity* of a supernatural gracious work of God upon men's moral nature, in order to the production of what is, in point of fact, indispensable to their salvation, has been usually regarded as necessary to entitle men to the designation of semi-Pelagians,—a designation which comprehends all who, while admitting the necessity of a supernatural work of God, come short of the full scriptural views of the *grounds* of this necessity, and of the source, character, and results of the work itself. The original Pelagian system upon this point is intelligible and definite, and so is the scriptural system of Augustine; while any intermediate view, whether it may or may not be what can, with historical correctness, be called semi-Pelagianism, is marked by obscurity and confusion. Leaving out of view the proper Pelagian or Socinian doctrine upon this subject, and confining our attention to the scriptural system of Augustine on the one hand, and, on the other hand, to those confused and indefinite notions which fall short of it, though not to such an

extent as the doctrines of the Pelagians and the Socinians, we would remark that it is conceded upon both sides: First, that before men are admitted into heaven they must repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and lead thereafter a life of new obedience; and, secondly, that men have a moral nature *so far* tainted by depravity, that this indispensable process cannot in any instance be carried through without a supernatural gracious work of God's Spirit upon them.

These two propositions embody most important and fundamental truths, clearly and fully taught in Scripture, and essential to a right comprehension of the way of salvation. Men who deny them may be justly regarded as refusing to submit to the authority of God's word, and as rejecting the counsel of God against themselves; while, on the other hand, men who honestly and intelligently receive them, though coming short of the whole scriptural truth in expounding and applying them, may be regarded as maintaining all that is fundamental upon this subject; by which I mean,—in accordance with the common Protestant doctrine of fundamentals as brought out in the controversy with the Church of Rome,—that some men who have held nothing more than this have afforded satisfactory evidence that they themselves were born again of the word of God, and have been honoured as the instruments of converting others through the preaching of the gospel. But while this is true, and ought not to be forgotten, it is of at least equal importance to observe, that many who have professed to receive these two propositions in the general terms in which we have stated them, have given too good ground to believe that this professed reception of them was decidedly defective either in integrity or in intelligence,—have so explained them, or rather explained them away, as to deprive them of all real meaning and efficacy, and practically to establish the power of man to save himself, and to prepare for heaven, upon the ruins of the free grace of God, which is manifested just as fully in the sanctification as in the justification of sinners. And hence the importance and necessity of clearly and definitely understanding what is the scriptural truth upon these subjects, lest we should be deceived by vague and indefinite plausibilities, which seem to establish the grace of God, while they in fact destroy it. Defective and erroneous views upon this subject are usually connected with defective and erroneous views in regard to the

totality of the moral corruption which attaches to men by nature, and of their consequent inability to do anything that is really spiritually good. It is manifest that any error or defect in men's views upon this subject will naturally and necessarily lead to erroneous and defective views of the nature, character, and results of that gracious work of God, by which man is led to will and to do what is good and well-pleasing in His sight.

When those who admit in general the necessity of a gracious work of God's Spirit upon men, in order to their repenting and believing the gospel, have yet erroneous and defective views upon the subject of divine grace, they usually manifest this by magnifying the power or influence of the truth or word of God,—by underrating the difficulty of repenting and believing,—by ascribing to men some remains of moral power for effecting these results, and some real and proper activity in the work of turning to God,—and by representing the work of God's Spirit as consisting chiefly, if not exclusively, in helping to impress the truth upon men's minds, or, more generally, rendering some aid or assistance to the original powers of man, and to the efforts which he makes. It is by such notions as these, though often very obscurely developed, insinuated rather than asserted, and sometimes mixed up with much that seems sound and scriptural, that the true doctrine of the gracious work of God in the conversion of sinners has been often undermined and altogether overthrown. These men have, more or less distinctly, confounded the word or the truth—which is merely the dead instrument—with the Spirit, who is the real agent, or efficient cause of the whole process. They have restricted the gracious work of the Spirit to the illumination of men's understandings through the instrumentality of the truth, as if their will did not require to be renewed, and as if all that was needful was that men should be aided intellectually to perceive what was their true state and condition by nature, and what provision had been made for their salvation in Christ, and then they would certainly repent and believe as a matter of course, without needing specially to have the enmity of their hearts to God and His truth subdued. They have represented the gracious work of the Spirit chiefly, if not exclusively, as co-operating with men, and aiding them in the work for which they have some natural capacity, though not enough to produce of themselves the necessary result, as if there was little or no need of *preventing* or *pre-*

venient grace, or grace going before, in order that man may work or act at all in believing and turning to God. These men are usually very anxious to represent faith in Jesus Christ as to some extent the work of men's own powers, the result of their own principles; and Augustine admits that he had some difficulty in satisfying himself for a time that faith was really and properly the gift of God, and was wrought in men by the operation of His Spirit, though this doctrine is very plainly and explicitly taught in Scripture. Much pains have been taken to explain how natural and easy saving faith is, to reduce it to great simplicity, to bring it down as it were to the level of the lowest capacity,—sometimes with better and more worthy motives, but sometimes also, we fear, in order to diminish, if not to exclude, the necessity of a supernatural preventing work of God's Spirit in producing it. And then, as repentance and conversion, as well as the whole process of sanctification, are beyond all doubt inseparably connected with the belief of the gospel, the way is thus paved for ascribing to man himself some share in the work of his deliverance from depravity, and his preparation for heaven.

One of the most subtle forms of the various attempts which have been made to obscure the work of God's Spirit in this matter, is that which represents faith as being antecedent—in the order of nature at least, though not of time—to the introduction or implantation of spiritual life into the soul of man, dead in sins and trespasses. This notion is founded upon these two grounds: first, upon a misapprehension of the full import of the scriptural doctrine, that man is dead in sin,—as if this death in sin, while implying a moral inability *directly* to love God, and to give true spiritual obedience to His law, did not equally imply a moral inability to apprehend aright divine truth, and to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ; and, secondly, upon a misapplication or perversion of the scriptural principle, that men are born again of the word of God through the belief of the truth,—as if this, while no doubt implying that the truth has been effectually brought to bear upon the mind before the process of being born again has been completed, so that the man is in the full exercise of new spiritual life, implied, moreover, that this efficacious operation of the truth must precede, in the order of nature, the whole work by which the Spirit *originates* the process of vivification; and the object and tendency of this notion, based upon these two grounds,

are to produce the impression that men, *through believing*, are able to do something towards making themselves, or at least towards becoming, spiritually alive, and thereby superseding to some extent the necessity of a supernatural work of God's Spirit in a point of primary and vital importance, intimately connected with the salvation of men. Man *is* dead in sin; the making him alive, the restoring him to life, is represented in Scripture as, in every part of the process, from its commencement to its conclusion, the work of God's Spirit. The instrumentality of the truth or the word is, indeed, employed in the process; but in the nature of the case, and in accordance with what is clearly taught in Scripture, there must, antecedently—at least in the order of nature, though not of time—to the truth being so brought to bear upon men's minds as to produce instrumentally any of its appropriate effects, be a work of God's Spirit, whereby spiritual life is implanted, and a capacity of perceiving and submitting to the truth, which had been hitherto rejected, is communicated,—a capacity which, indeed, previously existed, so far as concerns the mere intellectual framework of man's mental constitution—the mere psychological faculties which he possesses as being still a man, though fallen—but which was practically useless because of the entire bondage or servitude of his will, which required to be renewed, and could be renewed only by the immediate agency of God's Spirit. The doctrine of God's word upon this subject is fully maintained only when man is really regarded as being in his natural condition, morally dead to all that is really good, and when the first implantation of spiritual life, and all that results from it, including faith as well as repentance, turning to God and embracing the Lord Jesus Christ, is honestly, and without reserve or equivocation, traced to the supernatural agency of God's Spirit as its only efficient cause.

One other important point connected with this subject, which, from the time of Augustine till the present day, has been largely discussed, is what has been called the efficacy, or invincibility, or irresistibility of grace. Pelagians and semi-Pelagians have all united in denying the irresistibility of grace, and have virtually maintained—for it really comes to this in substance—that whatever power the Holy Spirit may put forth upon men in order to convert and renew them, it is in their power to resist it all, and to escape, so to speak, unconverted and unrenewed; while Augus-

tine maintained that the grace of God, the power of the Spirit in the Elect, always prevailed or overcame, and certainly took effect, whatever resistance men might make to it. This doctrine has been held in substance ever since by orthodox divines, though there has been some difference of opinion among them as to what were the terms in which the substance of the scriptural views upon the subject could be most fitly and accurately expressed.

Augustine, in asserting the invincibility or irresistibility of grace, did not mean,—and those who in subsequent times have embraced his general system of doctrine as scriptural, did not intend to convey the idea,—that man was compelled to do that which was good, or that he was forced to repent and believe against his will, whether he would or not, as the doctrine is commonly misrepresented; but merely that he was certainly and effectually made willing, by the renovation of his will through the power of God, *whenever that power was put forth in a measure SUFFICIENT or ADEQUATE to produce the result.* Augustine, and those who have adopted his system, did not mean to deny that men may, in some sense and to some extent, resist the Spirit, the possibility of which is clearly indicated in Scripture; inasmuch as they have most commonly held that, to use the language of our Confession, “persons who are not elected, and who finally perish, may have some common operations of the Spirit,” which, of course, they resist and throw off. The truth is, that this doctrine of the certain efficacy or irresistibility of grace is closely and necessarily connected with the doctrine of God’s purposes or decrees,—the great doctrine of predestination or election, which constitutes an essential part of the Pelagian controversy; and, indeed, it may be regarded as forming the connecting link between the doctrine of converting and renewing grace, as the true cause of all that is good in man, and that of personal election to everlasting life, as the source to which God’s effectual operation in working faith in men, and thereby uniting them to Christ, is to be traced. It is the Spirit of God whose supernatural agency restores men to life, and effects in them all that is indeed spiritually good. Whenever this agency is put forth in strength sufficient to effect the object of converting a sinner and uniting him to Christ by faith, it certainly does effect it, just because God had resolved to effect it, and has in consequence put forth the power necessary for doing so. What God does in time, He from eternity decreed to do,

because in the Infinite Mind there is no succession of time,—all things are at once and eternally present to it. When God exercises power, He is carrying into effect an eternal purpose; when He converts a sinner, He is executing a decree which He formed before the world began—before all ages.

The main questions connected with this important subject are these—First, Is God, when He sends forth His almighty Spirit,—when He converts a sinner and unites him to Christ,—influenced, in doing so, by a regard to anything existing in the man, by which *he* is distinguished from others, or by anything present in him? or is He influenced solely by His own purpose, previously formed,—formed from eternity,—of converting and saving that man? And, secondly, Does this general principle of an eternal purpose to save some men and to pass by the others, or to leave them in their natural condition of guilt and depravity, apply to and regulate God’s dealings with all the individuals of the human race? It is admitted by most of the opponents of predestination, properly so called, that God foresees from eternity whatsoever comes to pass; and that since He has foreseen all events, even those which embody the eternal fate of His intelligent creatures, and thus had them present to His mind, He may be said in a certain sense to have foreordained or foreappointed them; so that the question virtually and practically comes to this—Does God predestinate men to eternal life because He foresees that they will exercise faith and repentance? or does He foresee this because He has, of His own good pleasure, chosen them to faith and repentance, and resolved to bestow these gifts upon them in order that they may be saved in the way which He has appointed? If faith and repentance are men’s acts, in such a sense that they can exercise them by their own unaided efforts, without God’s agency, and can abstain from exercising them, whatever influence He may exert upon them; in other words, if the preventing and invincible grace of God be not the real source and efficient cause of all that is good in men, then the former view *may* be true, and election to life *may* rest upon the ground of faith and repentance foreseen; but if not, then the latter view must be true, and it must be certain that God has, of His own good pleasure, of His own sovereign purpose, elected some men to everlasting life, and in the mere execution of this purpose, has, in His own good time, given them, or wrought in them, faith and repentance.

It is not disputed that God usually gives men spiritual blessings—taking that expression in its widest sense—in a certain order, one being in some sense determined by what has preceded it; but the question is, whether the *commencement* of spiritual life wrought by God, and the whole series of spiritual blessings conferred by Him, viewed collectively and in the mass, can be really traced to any other cause or source than just this eternal purpose, founded on the counsel of His own will, to save some men, and His actually executing this purpose in time, in accordance with the provisions of the scheme which He has established for the salvation of sinners. There is really no medium between an election to life, resting as its foundation upon the faith, repentance, and holiness of individuals foreseen,—which is really no election, but a mere act of recognition,—and a choice or selection of individuals originating in the good pleasure of God, without any other cause known to, or knowable by, us,—a choice or selection followed up in due time, as its certain and necessary result, by the actual bestowal by God upon the individuals elected, of all that is necessary for securing their salvation. The latter of these views, we think, it can be proved, is clearly taught in Scripture; and though it no doubt involves much that is mysterious and inexplicable—much that may either call forth presumptuous objections, or profitably exercise men's faith and humility,—yet it certainly accords most fully with the actual phenomena of the moral and spiritual world, and it surely presents God in His true character and real position as the rightful and omnipotent governor of the world, the arbiter of the eternal destinies of His intelligent creatures. The former view—the only one which can be taken if that of unconditional election be rejected,—besides that it is inconsistent with the statements of Scripture, which plainly supports the opposite doctrine, is liable to the fatal and unanswerable objection, that it leaves everything bearing upon the character and eternal condition of all the individuals of our race undetermined, and, indeed, uninfluenced, by their Creator and Governor, and virtually beyond His control; and degrades Him to the condition of a mere spectator, who only sees what is going on among His creatures, or foresees what is to take place without Himself determining it, or exerting any real efficiency in the production of it, and who must be guided by what He thus sees or foresees in all His dealings with them. There is really no medium between

these two positions. God either really governs the world, and determines the character and destinies of His intelligent creatures; or else these creatures are practically independent of Him, the absolute regulators of their own conduct, and the omnipotent arbiters of their own destinies. And it is surely much more becoming our condition and capacities, even though there was less clear scriptural evidence upon the subject than there is, to lean to the side of maintaining fully the divine supremacy,—of relying implicitly upon the divine justice, holiness, and faithfulness,—and resolving all difficulties, which we cannot solve, into our own ignorance and incapacity; than to that of replying against God,—arraigning the principles of His moral administration,—and practically excluding Him from the government of the most important department of the world which He has created, and ever sustains.

Sec. IV.—Perseverance of the Saints.

Another topic of primary importance, which was treated of fully and formally by Augustine in his controversy with the Pelagians, is what is commonly called the perseverance of the saints;—or the doctrine that men who have once been really enabled to believe in Jesus Christ, and have been born again of the word of God, do never totally and finally fall away from a state of grace, but are certainly enabled to persevere, and are preserved unto eternal salvation.

This doctrine of perseverance is manifestly a necessary part of the general scheme of Christian doctrine, which Augustine did so much to expound and defend; and what is still more important,—for it is not very safe for men to place *much* reliance upon their own mere perception of the logical connection of doctrines in regard to divine things,—it is, we are persuaded, clearly taught in the statements of Scripture. If the doctrines to which we have already adverted are, indeed, contained in the word of God, the men of whom it is asserted that they will certainly persevere and be saved, are placed in *this* condition,—viz., that God has from eternity chosen *them* to everlasting life; and that in the execution of this purpose or decree, He has given *them* faith and repentance, He has united them to Christ, and renewed their natures. All this, which could be effected by no power but His own, He has done, and done for the express purpose of saving them with an

eternal salvation. Of men so placed—treated by God in such a way for such a purpose—it may surely be asserted with perfect confidence, that He will certainly enable them to persevere, and will thereby secure their eternal welfare. Had God formed no definite purpose of mercy in regard to individuals of our fallen race, we could not have been certain that any would have been saved. Were men able to convert themselves, and to prepare for heaven, in the exercise of their own natural powers and capacities, while it is possible that they might succeed, it is equally possible of any of them, apart from God's electing purpose, that they might fall off and ultimately fail. Were divine grace exerted in such a way and in such a measure, that it was still in the power of any man, in the exercise of his own natural and inherent capacities, to resist it, or to remain unaffected by it, then neither God nor man could speak with anything like certainty in any case of the ultimate result; whereas the very different and opposite state of things, in regard to all these important subjects, which the word of God unfolds to us, and which we have already explained in treating of the subjects of efficacious grace and predestination, makes the final perseverance of all who are thus placed and treated, not only practicable, but ascertainable and certain.

The connection which subsists among these different doctrines,—original and total depravity; converting, efficacious, or invincible grace; eternal election, and final perseverance,—the relation in which they all stand to each other,—the full, compact, and comprehensive view which, in combination, they exhibit of the leading departments and whole substance of divine revelation, of what God has unfolded to us concerning Himself and concerning our race, concerning His plans and operations, and our capacities and destinies,—all this greatly confirms their truth and reality, as it exhibits them all as affording to each other mutual strength and support.

It is right, however, to mention, that in regard to the subject of perseverance there is a certain amount of error and apparent inconsistency to be found in Augustine's works. He held, decidedly and consistently, that all who are predestinated, or elected to everlasting life, are certainly and infallibly enabled to persevere, and do all in fact attain to salvation; but he sometimes writes, as if he thought that men who had been the subjects of converting and renewing grace, might fall away and finally perish.

He held, indeed, that this falling away was of itself a conclusive proof that they had not been elected, and so far he was perfectly orthodox and consistent; but he does not seem to have been quite so certain that, though not elected, and therefore finally perishing, some men might not have been brought for a time by God's grace under the influence of sanctified principles or real holiness,—and yet totally and finally fall away. This notion was inconsistent with the general principles of his system, and is certainly not sanctioned or required by anything contained in Scripture. The Scripture, by what it tells us of the deceitfulness of the heart, and of sin, of the impossibility of men knowing with anything like absolute certainty the true state of the character of others,—by reserving the power of searching the heart to God alone,—and by sanctioning the principle obviously involved in the declaration of the apostle, "They went out from us, because they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us,"—affords us abundant materials for explaining or accounting for all anomalous cases, all apparent instances of apostasy. And it is not, after all, quite certain that Augustine's statements upon this subject necessarily imply more than that cases of apostasy occurred in individuals who, *so far as man can judge*, had fairly entered upon the path that leads to heaven,—a position which no one disputes.

If his error really was more serious than this, it is not very difficult to see what tempted him to adopt it: it was the notion which was held in a gross and utterly anti-evangelical form by many of the fathers, and from the taint of which Augustine was not altogether free, of making baptism stand in some measure both for justification and regeneration. A man who rightly understands the nature of justification as a judicial or forensic act, and the true connection both of justification and regeneration with faith in Jesus Christ, by which we are united to Him, and who along with this believes in personal election to life, will not easily fall into the error which Augustine seems in some measure to have imbibed. The man who has thoroughly clear and scriptural views of what is involved in the change that takes place, both as respects men's state and character, when they are united by faith to Christ, will not readily believe that any in whom *this* change has been effected by God, will be allowed to fall away and to perish, even though he should not have very clear and distinct views

—which, however, Augustine had—upon the subject of personal election. Augustine's error and inconsistency, or rather perhaps his obscurity and confusion, upon this point, is thus clearly enough traceable to what has been called the sacramental principle, as implying an exaggerated sense of the necessity and efficacy of outward ordinances,—from which scarcely any of the fathers, except those who had personally associated with the apostles, are altogether free, and which still continues to be one of Satan's chief contrivances for perverting the gospel of the grace of God, and ruining the souls of men.

We may mention, as a sort of set-off to this defect or error of Augustine's, that Arminius and his immediate followers before the Synod of Dort, while rejecting the other leading doctrines of the Augustinian or Calvinistic system, did not venture at first to deny the doctrine of perseverance, but professed for a time that they had not fully made up their mind regarding it. In the Conference at the Hague—*Collatio Hagiensis*—held in the year 1611, after the death of Arminius, the Remonstrants, or Arminians, after stating fully the provisions made in the gospel for enabling believers to grow in knowledge and in grace, proceed to say: “*Sed an illi ipsi negligentia sua, principium illud, quo sustentantur in Christo, deserere non possint, et presentem mundum iterum amplecti, a sancta doctrina ipsis semel tradita deficere, conscientia naufragium facere, a gratia excidere; penitus ex sacra Scriptura esset expendendum, antequam illud cum plena animi tranquillitate et plerophoria docere possimus.*”^{*} Before the Synod of Dort in 1618, however, they had made up their mind on this question, and decidedly rejected the doctrine of perseverance. Something similar to this occurred in the case of John Wesley, whose theological views were almost wholly identical with those of Arminius. In the earlier part of his life, in 1743, he was, he says, “inclined to believe that there is a state attainable in this life from which a man cannot finally fall.” But this doctrine he was afterwards led to renounce.[†]

^{*} *Amesii Coronis ad Collationem Hagiensem*, p. 285. Amstel. 1650. | [†] *Watson's Life of Wesley* (*Watson's Works*, vol. v., p. 227).

CHAPTER XII.

THE WORSHIP OF SAINTS AND IMAGES.

IN considering the testimony of the early church—the church of the first three centuries—on the subjects which are still controverted among professing Christians, I adverted very briefly to its bearing upon those topics usually comprehended under the head of the charge of idolatry, which Protestants commonly adduce against the Church of Rome, especially the worship or *cultus* which she renders to saints and images. Romanists cannot adduce from this period any testimony in favour of the doctrine and practice of their church upon these subjects, though it is true that an unwarrantable and excessive veneration for the memory, and even the relics, of martyrs and confessors had begun to show itself even in this early age; and this was, no doubt, the germ and origin of the gross polytheism which soon after began to prevail. Mr Isaac Taylor, in the second volume of his “*Ancient Christianity*,” has proved that what he calls Demonolatry, or the religious worship and invocation of dead men, prevailed largely in the latter part of the fourth and in the fifth century, and was sanctioned by the most eminent men whom the church then contained, and even by Augustine himself. This had sprung up so readily, though by a gradual process, from the veneration paid to martyrs in the earlier period, and it is so natural to the mind of man, when true religion is in a decaying state, that it came to prevail almost universally in the church, without giving rise to any controversial discussions which might mark the stages of its progress. There can be no doubt that, in the fifth and sixth centuries, there prevailed largely in the church a worship which might be fairly called polytheistic, and on which the monotheism of Mahomet was a decided improvement; though there is no sufficient evidence of the introduction of the formal invocation of saints into the public and prescribed services of the church till the seventh century.

The veneration of relics in the Christian church preceded the veneration of images, whether paintings or statues; and it is certain that there is no trace of image-worship so long as the Christians were engaged in open conflict with pagan idolaters, and therefore bound to abstain from the more palpable and offensive forms in which pagan idolatry manifested itself. In the course of the sixth century, after paganism was finally suppressed under Justinian, we find evidences of pictures of Christ and the martyrs being introduced into the churches for ornament, though there is no proof as yet that any religious worship or *cultus* was paid to them. The process, however, of the corruption of true religion advanced; and as at once the cause and the effect of this, the introduction into the church of the views and practices of paganism continued to go on with increasing rapidity, until in the eighth century, some reaction having arisen against the veneration now generally paid to images, the great contest took place upon this subject, which was certainly carried on with carnal weapons, produced much bloodshed and many crimes, and terminated at last in the establishment of the worship of images, as an ordinary part of public worship, both in the Eastern and the Western Churches,—with this only difference, that in the Eastern or Greek Church, the worship was, and is, restricted to paintings of Christ and the saints, while in the Western or Latin Church it was extended to statues as well as to pictures. The most important epoch in the history of this contest about image-worship, is the second Council of Nice, held in 787, received as an œcumenical council both by the Greek and Latin Churches, and referred to by the Council of Trent, and by Romish writers in general, as establishing, in virtue of its infallibility as representing the universal church, the worship of images upon an impregnable foundation.

It is chiefly upon the ground of giving religious worship to saints and angels, and especially to the Virgin Mary, and to the images of Christ and the saints, that the charge of idolatry, commonly adduced by Protestants against the Church of Rome, is founded; and as this is a topic of some importance and of some intricacy, and as it has given rise to a great deal of discussion, it may be proper to give a brief account of it. And in doing so, we shall advert, first, to the historical department of the question, investigating what the doctrine of the Church of Rome upon these

subjects is, and indicating some of the principal facts connected with its development and establishment; and afterwards give a brief exposition of some of the theological principles that bear upon the settlement of the controversy.

Sec. I.—Historical Statement.

In regard to the religious worship or *cultus* that should be paid to the saints and angels, and especially to the Virgin Mary, the fullest, the most formal and authoritative statement of the doctrine of the Church of Rome, is that of the Council of Trent. Even in the Council of Trent, the doctrine of the church upon this subject was not very distinctly defined or very clearly explained, although much prominence had been given to it by the Reformers in defending their separation from the Church of Rome. Their doctrines upon the subject of the worship both of saints and images were hastily slurred over in the last session of the council (the twenty-fifth), along with the equally delicate and difficult topics of purgatory and indulgences. With respect to this whole class of subjects, it is evident enough that the Council of Trent avoided giving any very exact or complete exposition of the church's doctrine, probably from a sort of lurking consciousness that it could not well stand a thorough investigation; and likewise in order to leave room for notions on these subjects being propagated, and practices being diffused, among the people, which, when challenged by their opponents, they might not be obliged to acknowledge and defend as the recognised doctrines of the church.

The substance of the doctrine of the Church of Rome upon these subjects of saints and images is thus stated in the profession of faith of Pope Pius IV., to which every Popish priest has sworn adherence,—that the saints reigning along with Christ are to be venerated and invoked; that they offer prayers to God for us; and that their relics are to be venerated; that the images of Christ and His mother, ever virgin, and those also of other saints, are to be kept, and that *due* (*debitum*) honour and veneration are to be given to them. There is not much more information as to what is the doctrine of the Church of Rome to be derived from the somewhat fuller statements upon these subjects in the decrees or in the Catechism of the Council of Trent, excepting only, in

general, that we ought to have recourse to their prayers, *help*, and *assistance*, but that they are not to be worshipped with the same honour as God, or with the species of worship which is admitted to be due to Him alone; and that images are not to be invoked as if anything were to be sought and obtained from them, or as if any divinity resided in them, the worship that is given to them being to be referred to the objects—*i.e.*, Christ or the saints—whom they represent. There is no other declaration of the doctrine of the Church of Rome upon the subject of the worship of saints and angels; and what is vague, defective, or ambiguous here, must be supplied from the writings of her standard and approved authors; but on the subject of the veneration of images, we have, in addition, the acts and decrees of the second Council of Nice, held in 787, which is recognised by the Council of Trent, and by the Church of Rome as œcumenical, and therefore infallible; and is expressly referred to in the decree of the Council of Trent as the leading authority upon this point.

The history and character of the second Council of Nice* have become an important point in the discussion of this question; and there is certainly nothing in all we know about it that is in the least fitted to conciliate respect or deference to its decisions. Archbishop Tillotson has given a character of this council, which is fully confirmed by the undoubted facts of the case. It is this: "The second Council of Nice pretended their doctrine of image-worship to have descended to them by an uninterrupted tradition, and proved it most doughtily by texts of Scripture ridiculously wrested, by impertinent sayings out of obscure and counterfeit authors, and by fond (*i.e.*, foolish) and immodest stories (as is acknowledged by Pope Adrian VI.) of apparitions and women's dreams, etc., for which I refer the reader to the council itself; which is such a mess of fopperies, that if a general council of atheists had met together with a design to abuse religion by talking ridiculously concerning it, they could not have done it more effectually."† And again he says,‡ "The second Council of Nice,

* Whitby and Comber in the seventh volume of Gibson's *Preservative*. Basnage and Forbes. *Phillippott's Letters to Butler*, and *Supplemental Letter*. *Stillingfleet's Defence of Discourse on Idolatry*. See on this whole subject,

Chemnitii Examen Concil. Trident., P. iii. and iv.

† Tillotson, *Rule of Faith*, P. iv., sec. i., p. 308. Ed. 1676.

‡ Tillotson, *Rule of Faith*, P. ii., sec. iii., p. 95.

to establish their doctrine of image-worship, does so palpably abuse and wrest texts of Scripture, that I can hardly believe that any Papist in the world hath the forehead to own *that* for the true sense of those texts which is there given by those fathers." This council, then,—acting wholly under the influence of a very worthless woman, the Empress Irene (who, having murdered her husband, reigned during the minority of her son), and containing no men of eminence as theologians, no men who have secured for themselves, on any ground, an honourable reputation in the church, but which Papists are obliged by their principles to regard as enjoying the infallible guidance of the Holy Ghost,—decreed and established the worship of images in the professing church of Christ, and thus involved it in the guilt of idolatry. The substance of the decree of this council upon this subject was this: that *προσκύνησις* and *ἀσπασμός* were to be given to the *σεπταὶ καὶ ἅγιοι εἰκόνες* of the cross of Christ, His mother, the angels, and all saints; but that this was not to be the same honour or worship that is given to God; that the honour paid to the image passed to the object which it represented; and that he who adores or worships the image,—*προσκύνει*,—worships or adores (the same word) him whose likeness it is.

Papists are now in general ashamed of the grounds or reasons which this council adopted and rested on as the foundation of their decree in favour of the worship of images,—of their silly and childish perversions of Scripture,—of their quotation, as authorities, of works ascribed to some of the fathers, now universally acknowledged to be forgeries,—and of the ridiculous and offensive stories about apparitions and miracles, which were all gravely adduced and founded on by the council, as proofs that images ought to be worshipped. In modern times, they commonly allege that the Church of Rome is bound only by the general final decision of the council, and is not obliged to approve of the grounds or reasons which the council adduced and assigned for it. This, however, is an unwarrantable evasion. The council is universally regarded by Romanists as œcumenical and infallible,—it being represented in this character by the Council of Trent. Its infallibility, of course, originated in the presiding guidance of the Holy Ghost; and if the Holy Spirit really presided in and directed the assembly, as Papists believe to have been the case, they surely must have been preserved from error in the grounds or reasons

they assigned for their doctrinal conclusions, as well as in the conclusions themselves, especially when they were professing to be giving the true sense and import of scriptural statements. It is in vain for Romanists to attempt to escape from the responsibility of anything which commended itself to the minds of a body of men whom, in their collective capacity, they regard as invested with infallibility, in virtue of the Holy Spirit presiding among them. We do not doubt that modern Romanists are heartily ashamed of many things set forth by the second Council of Nice, but there does not appear to be any way by which they can escape from the responsibility of all its deliverances, except by denying its infallibility; and the impossibility of their denying this, without renouncing some of their most important and fundamental principles, is just one of the many mill-stones which the claims and pretensions of the Church of Rome have fastened immovably around its neck. Besides, it is also deserving of remark, that in the Catechism of the Council of Trent,* reference is made, as to an authority upon this subject, not only to the seventh action or session of the second Council of Nice, which contains the general decree, but to several of the preceding actions, in which the grounds or reasons of their ultimate deliverance are set forth; and that we even find in it a general reference to the second Council of Nice, *passim*, which must in all fairness be regarded as sanctioning the general substance of its proceedings and deliverances, not merely its one final decision.

Romish writers encourage their readers in the belief that miracles have been often wrought by images, and that some particular images possess this power in a pre-eminent degree; but they are very unwilling, in modern times, to admit that their church is to be held responsible for this notion, or to be held committed to the reality of any particular miracles; and their unwillingness to face the ridiculous miracles recorded and founded upon by the second Council of Nice, makes them peculiarly anxious to escape from the necessity of defending *all* its deliverances. And yet it ought to be mentioned to the credit of that council, as being the only symptom of sense or decency observable in its proceedings, that it admitted that the images of *that* age were not much in the habit of working miracles, and that they

* Pars iii., cap. ii.

had to go back to former generations in order to collect proofs of this description. This feature in their conduct contrasts favourably with that of some Popish authorities in more modern times, who published at the time an official account, with the approbation of the Master of the Sacred Palace, of many miracles wrought by images in Italy in 1796 and 1797. This miraculous power was then exhibited chiefly by the images weeping and groaning, when the French armies under Napoleon entered Italy; and the official account, duly attested, was translated into English, and published in London, under the patronage of the Popish bishops, for the edification and comfort of the faithful. In our own day, the miracle by which images commonly confirm and edify the faithful, is winking.

Some important historical transactions succeeded the second Council of Nice, which, though we cannot enter into any details concerning them, are worthy of being noticed and remembered. Pope Adrian I., who may be said to have presided in this council by his legates, confirmed and sanctioned its proceedings and decrees, which were in entire accordance with his own views. Image-worship, however, as established by this council, met with great opposition in the Western Church, especially in France and Britain,—a plain proof that, at that time, neither the infallibility of councils, nor the supremacy of the Pope, was universally acknowledged. A book was prepared, in refutation of the arguments and conclusions of this council, in the name and by the authority of the Emperor Charlemagne, in the year 790, and transmitted by him to the Pope. This work is usually known under the name of *Liber Carolinus*, or *Libri Carolini*. It is divided into four books, and it openly condemns the whole proceedings of the Council of Nice, adducing no fewer than one hundred and twenty objections against them, declaring “that they contained folly, absurdity, malignity, senseless conjectures, and execrable errors derived from paganism; that the council perverted the Scriptures, and had not produced one relevant quotation from the Bible; that it distorted the extracts from the fathers, perverting the order, the sense, and the words; and had brought forward many puerilities from apocryphal writings.” The work contains likewise an excellent and judicious proof from Scripture of the unlawfulness of employing images in the worship of God, or paying to them any external mark of religious honour and veneration. This work Charlemagne

sent to Pope Adrian, and his Holiness honoured it with a confutation by his own hand. This work of the Pope has come down to us; it is found in the Collection of Councils, and it may be most justly described in the terms which Charlemagne and Tillotson have applied to the proceedings of the council itself. It defends the whole proceedings of the council, and it exhibits quite as much of what is absurd and despicable. Some specimens of its arguments are given in Forbes' *Instructiones Historico-Theologicæ*.* Notwithstanding all this, the practice of image-worship was far from being generally approved of and adopted; and in 794, a council was held upon the subject at Frankfort, which had at least as good a title to be reckoned œcumenical as that of Nice, as it consisted of three hundred bishops from France, Germany, Spain, and Britain. This council condemned the proceedings and decisions of the second Council of Nice, and approved of the *Liber Carolinus*; and though it did not reject the giving some religious honour to the saints, it laid down general principles, which, if fairly followed out, would have as conclusively shut out the worship of saints as of images.

These facts are exceedingly perplexing to Romish controversialists, both on account of their bearing upon the particular subject of image-worship, and also of their bearing upon the general questions of the authority of councils and the supremacy of the Pope. Some of them have attempted to involve in doubt and obscurity the genuineness of the *Liber Carolinus*, and the Acts of the Council of Frankfort; but this is too desperate a course, and cannot be presented with anything like plausibility. It is accordingly rejected,—at least so far as the Council of Frankfort is concerned,—both by Baronius and Bellarmine. All that *they* attempted to establish upon the point is this: that the Council of Frankfort condemned the proceedings and decrees of the Council of Nice, under the influence of two errors or mistakes in matters of *fact*;—believing erroneously first, that the Council of Nice had decreed that images should receive the same honour and worship as God Himself; and, secondly, that the proceedings of that council had not been confirmed by the Pope. These allegations, however, are not only destitute of evidence, but can

* Forbesii *Instructiones Hist. Theol.*, | l'Eglise, tom. i., p. 571. Stillingfleet's
Lib. vii., c. xi. Basnage, *Histoire de* | Defence.

be positively and conclusively disproved. It can be easily shown that the Council of Frankfort understood correctly what the Council of Nice had decreed, and was fully aware that the Pope approved of its proceedings, and yet deliberately rejected and condemned it.*

There is probably no one of the subjects involved in the controversy between Protestants and Papists, with respect to which Papists are more accustomed to complain that Protestants misunderstand and misrepresent their views, than this one of the worship of saints and images, on which we commonly base the charge of idolatry against them. But the complaint has no foundation to rest upon. We really do not charge them with holding any doctrines upon this subject, but what we can prove that the Church of Rome has sanctioned; and we think we can prove that the admitted and undoubted doctrine of the Church of Rome affords sufficient grounds for the charges of polytheism and idolatry. We charge Romanists with no practices in these matters which we cannot prove to be sanctioned by their approved writers, by their authorized books of devotion, and by their own ordinary mode of speaking and acting. We know well enough what it is they hold upon this subject, so far as their church has defined her doctrine regarding it; we know what are the grounds on which she defends the doctrine she maintains; we think we can appreciate aright these grounds, and prove them to be utterly insufficient. We do not charge them with giving to saints and angels the same honour and worship which they profess to render to God; but we allege that they do give religious honour and worship to saints and angels, though they call it inferior, or subordinate in degree, to that which they render to God; and we think we can prove that Scripture not only does not warrant, but forbids, giving *any* religious honour or worship to saints or angels, and restricts it to God alone. We do not charge them with praying to saints and angels, and applying to them for spiritual blessings, *as if* they believed them to possess the attributes of Divinity; but we maintain that God claims to Himself alone those services, those expressions of reverence and confidence, which Romanists pay to saints and angels; that He claims them

* Forbesii *Instructiones Historico-* | Natalis Alexander, *saec. viii.*, Dis-
Theologicæ, Lib. vii., c. xi. | sert. vi.

on the ground of His infinite and incommunicable perfections, and that it is unwarrantable and unreasonable in itself, as well as inconsistent with Scripture, to render them to any but God; and on this ground we consider ourselves entitled to assert that the doctrine of the Church of Rome upon this subject involves practically and substantially polytheism,—or the introduction of many inferior beings to share in the honour and worship which should be reserved to the one true God alone.

There is, perhaps, greater difficulty in ascertaining, and therefore more probability of our mistaking, the doctrine of the Church of Rome on the subject of the honour and veneration that should be paid to the images of Christ, the Virgin, and the saints. It is certain that the Church of Rome teaches that they ought to be kept in churches, as the Trent Catechism says,* “*ut excolantur,*” and that, as a part of the worship of God, religious honour and veneration are to be paid to them; while she also teaches that there is no divinity in them, that they are not to be prayed *to*, that they are not to be asked or expected to bestow spiritual blessings, and that the veneration paid to them passes, or is transferred, to the object they represent. If the veneration paid to images passes, or is transferred, to the object they represent, it would seem as if it was not intended that any honour or veneration was due, and was to be paid directly, to the images themselves; and yet the Church of Rome expressly declares that it is right *eis debitum honorem et venerationem impertire, illis honorem et cultum adhibere*, as if they were themselves the direct and proper objects of this veneration and worship.† The authorized doctrine of the church upon this subject is thus involved in obscurity and ambiguity, if not inconsistency; and, indeed, there are considerable diversities of opinion on this point among her own most eminent writers. Bellarmine says ‡ that there are three different opinions held in the Church of Rome, in regard to the kind of worship—*de genere cultus*—to which images are entitled,—viz., first, that an image ought not in any way to be worshipped in itself, or on its own account, but only that the person represented by it should be worshipped in the presence of the image.

* Part iii., c. ii.
† Concil. Trident., Sess. xxv., et
Professio Fidei Pii IV.

Catech. Trident., P. iii., c. ii.
‡ Bellar. Opera, 1619, tom. ii.,
825.

This view manifestly comes short of what is taught upon the subject by the Councils of Nice and Trent, which plainly make the images themselves the direct and proper objects of honour and veneration. Secondly, that the same honour and veneration are to be given to the image as to the person it represents; that the same honour is to be given, for example, to an image of Christ as to Christ Himself; and so in like manner in regard to the Virgin and the saints. This view was held by St Thomas Aquinas, the angelic doctor, and by other eminent Romish writers. This opinion likewise seems to be inconsistent with the decree of the second Council of Nice, erring by excess as the former does by defect; and the only way in which Bellarmine can explain the fact that many great doctors should have adopted it, is by supposing that they had never happened to see the acts of this œcumenical council, or the work of Pope Adrian in defence of it. Bellarmine himself, with the generality of Romish writers, adopts a view intermediate between these two extremes, and maintains—first, that images are to be worshipped of themselves, or on their own account, and properly—“*imagines per se et proprie colendas esse;*”—secondly, that they are not *per se* and *proprie* to be worshipped with the same honour as the objects they represent; but, thirdly, that they may receive the same worship as the objects they represent, “*improprie et per accidens.*” And then he lays down this doctrine as a great general principle, intended to combine and harmonize these different views,—viz., that the worship which in itself and properly is due to images is a certain imperfect worship, that analogically and reductively belongs to that species or kind of worship which is due to the object represented by the image,* “*Cultus qui per se, et proprie debetur imaginibus, est cultus quidam imperfectus, qui analogicè et reductivè pertinet ad speciem ejus cultus, qui debetur exemplari.*” This proposition, in which Bellarmine embodies the essence of the answer to the question as to the kind of worship to be given to images, is not very intelligible, and probably was not intended to be understood; but it exhibits the *ne plus ultra* of what learning and talent could do in explaining the true doctrine of the Church of Rome upon this subject; and the diversity of opinion subsisting among her most

* Bellarm. Opera, 1619, tom. ii., 834.

eminent writers, and the perplexity and confusion of her most distinguished champion in expounding this topic, present rather a singular contrast to the facility and confidence with which we often hear Romanists—who are probably as ignorant of the authorized decision of the Council of Nice as St Thomas Aquinas, the angelic doctor, was—propound the doctrine of their church on this point, and expose the alleged Protestant misrepresentation of it. We care little for these differences and perplexities, except as exhibiting the falsehood of the common boastings of Papists in their unity in clear and well-ascertained doctrines, and the special difficulties of their position on this question; for the ground we take upon this point is clear and definite, and strikes at the root of all the Romish doctrines and practices, whatever form or aspect they may assume,—viz., that it is unlawful, unwarranted by Scripture, and inconsistent with its statements, to introduce images into the worship of God, and to pay them *any* religious honour and veneration whatever.

Sec. II.—Doctrinal Exposition.

Having given some account of the real nature and import of the doctrine of the Church of Rome on the subject of the worship of saints and images, and of the leading historical circumstances connected with its origin and development; and especially of the second Council of Nice, where the doctrine of the worship of images was first formally established, and of the opposition which its decrees met with, I have now to advert briefly to some of the principal grounds on which the Romish doctrine on the subject has been assailed and defended.

The tendency to polytheism and idolatry,—*i.e.*, to the religious worship of a variety of beings, distinct from and inferior to the one supreme God, and the introduction of images or visible representations of the objects of worship into religious services,—is a very prominent feature in the character of fallen man, the result and manifestation of man's ungodliness, or his estrangement from the one only living and true God—his aversion to contemplate and realize one invisible Being, on whom he wholly depends for life, and breath, and all things. This tendency has been most fully exhibited in the whole history of our race. The world was soon overspread with polytheism and idolatry, and it still continues

to be so wherever the Christian revelation is unknown. This plainly indicates the tendency of fallen man in religious matters; and the full general results of this tendency, as exhibited in the leading features of heathenism, in every age and country, have been undoubtedly most offensive to God, most injurious to religion, and most degrading to mankind.

The leading features of heathen polytheism and idolatry stand out palpably to our observation, even upon the most cursory survey. No one can mistake them. They are manifestly these two,—viz., first, the giving of religious worship and homage to a number of inferior beings along with the one Supreme God; and, secondly, the use of images, or outward visible representations of these beings, supreme and inferior, in the religious worship and homage which are rendered to them. These two features of the common heathen idolatry, as thus generally stated and described, manifestly apply to the doctrine and practice of the Church of Rome, with respect to saints and images; and her advocates have, in consequence, felt the necessity of pointing out clear distinctions between their case and that of the heathen, in order that they may escape from the charge of idolatry,—a crime so frequently and so severely denounced in Scripture. They are the more anxious to effect this, because it is undeniable that the fathers, to whom they are so much in the habit of referring as authorities, are accustomed, when they are exposing the idolatry of their heathen adversaries, to make statements which, as they stand, decidedly condemn as irrational and anti-scriptural what is now taught and practised in the Church of Rome. The distinctions which they attempt to set up are chiefly these: First, that the heathen give to these inferior beings the same worship and homage which they render to the Supreme Being—that they worship them all equally as gods; whereas they (the Romanists) give to saints and angels only an inferior or subordinate worship or homage, and reserve to God a higher kind or species of worship that ought to be rendered to no creature; and, secondly, that the heathen worshipped the images of false gods,—*i.e.*, of beings who had no real existence, or were not entitled to any religious respect,—or worshipped them in the belief that the images themselves were gods, or that some divinity resided in them, which could hear prayer and confer blessings; whereas they (the Romanists) worship or venerate only the images of Christ, His