

'STAND FAST IN THE FAITH'

(A Weekly Instruction specially written for the
N.Z. TABLET by GHIMEL.)

INDULGENCES.

(Continued.)

Underlying the Church's granting of Indulgences there is this idea: sin deserves punishment, and the sinner, happy in the forgiveness of his offence, ought to be prepared to pay the penalty. This penalty has to be paid either by actual suffering in purgatory when this life is over, or by the performance during life on earth of some deeds which have an atoning or satisfactory value. God's justice—which demands that due reparation shall be made for all offences—must not go unvindicated, even when the sinner is restored to favor. And of the two ways of satisfying the claims of that justice, surely that must be preferable in God's eyes which we take upon ourselves here, for that is freely undertaken, and therefore, other things being equal, of more value. On this principle the Church's doctrine of Indulgences is built.

There is yet another principle justifying the doctrine of Indulgences. If A commits a sin, it is clear that the guilt of the sin can be taken away only by A's own sorrow of heart. But it is equally clear that the case is different with the punishment attached to sin. It is no uncommon thing for one man to bear another's punishment, and we honor as a hero the man who will bear in silence what his friend should be paying. If this way of acting is commendable amongst us, is it not equally becoming in the relations of men with God? It certainly is in one case—that of the Man-God bearing on the Cross our sins and our just punishments. And may not His humble followers in their own small way practise charity in a similar way, offering themselves as victims for the sins of others and for their just punishments; and this in two ways—by taking upon themselves definite penances for particular persons, and also, more generally, by having, as St. Thomas puts it, 'the intention that all they suffered or did for God might avail not for themselves only, but for the whole Church.'

Our Blessed Lady, for example, was free from the slightest stain of sin and therefore from all debt of punishment. If it is a sign of surpassing love to give one's life for a friend, what could not this spotless friend of God offer to God—her days of unremitting goodness and suffering, as well as her saintly death, for the benefit of us, her brothers and sisters? The Saints of the Church spent their days in heroic deeds of penance—the many of them never fell into any wrongdoing—and in active charity towards their neighbors: they more than paid for any debt of temporal punishment they owed God. What is to be done with the surplus? Is it to lie idle and unused? What is to prevent it from being used for the benefit of those penitent souls who, after their restoration to divine favor, have still a heavy debt to pay to the Divine Justice and are too weak to discharge it all in this life? Our Blessed Saviour especially heaped up an infinite store of merits, and as we know for us, not for Himself. 'Upon the altar of the Cross,' wrote Pope Clement VI. in 1343, 'Christ shed of His Blood not merely a drop, though this would have sufficed, by reason of the union with the Word, to redeem the whole human race, but a copious torrent . . . thereby laying up an infinite treasure for mankind. This treasure He neither wrapped up in a napkin nor hid in a field, but entrusted to Blessed Peter, the key-bearer, and his successors, that they might, for just and reasonable causes, distribute it to the faithful in full or in partial remission of the temporal punishment due to sin.' St. Thomas Aquinas had already written: 'All this treasure is at the disposal of the chief rulers of the Church, in as much as our Lord gave the keys of the Church to Peter. When, then, the utility or the necessity of the Church requires it, the chief ruler of the Church can draw from this infinite store of merits, to communicate to anyone who through charity is a member

of the Church, as much as he deems to be opportune, whether it be such as will suffice for the total remission of the punishment or up to a certain portion of the whole; in such wise, namely, that the Passion of Christ [through Whom alone the merits of others have any efficacy at all] and the other Saints may be imparted to him just as if he himself had suffered what was necessary for the remission of his sin, as happens when one person satisfies for another.'

SIDELIGHTS ON THE WAR

GENERAL.

Canon Hannay ('George A. Bermingham'), County Mayo, who has just returned from a tour in the U.S.A., in discussing in a London journal the question of American neutrality, says that English apologists, writers, etc., have seldom been able to shake themselves free of a feeling that America is still in some sense an English colony. He says that 80 out of every 100 of the people are in favor of the Allies.

GERMAN METHODS.

M. Rene Bazin, the eminent Academician, whose recent visit to Rome has, it is believed, contributed to make his country better known in Italian ecclesiastical circles, relates the following episode of the German atrocities in Belgium (writes a Paris correspondent). Among the towns that were most cruelly treated by the invaders was the little city of Termonde; it was shelled nine times, three-quarters of its houses were burnt, and out of its nine thousand inhabitants only two thousand remain. For centuries there existed at Termonde a local community of nuns, founded in medieval times, in whose old-world convent a number of poor and infirm old people were cared for till death released them. Through years of peace and years of war the nuns continued their mission of charity: it was rudely interrupted by the German invaders in the autumn of 1914, when a German commander summoned the Superioress to leave the house on the spot. 'I have orders to burn it,' he added. 'I cannot leave my old people.' 'Take them with you.' 'Some are bed-ridden and cannot walk.' 'Do as you like, but I am going to burn the house.' At last it was settled that the nuns should take away the old people who could walk, and that the others should be removed to a place of safety by the soldiers. As she was about to cross the threshold of her convent, the Superioress was stopped by a young Sister. 'Mother,' she said, 'our chaplain was dragged away before he had time to remove the Blessed Sacrament: do you think I might bring it away to save it from profanation?' The Superioress bowed her assent, and the young nun ran to the chapel. Half an hour later the convent was in flames. The charitable bequests of generations were thus deliberately and ruthlessly destroyed. Along the road from Termonde to Ghent a strange procession made its way: old men and women, tottering, blind, paralyzed, were carefully led along the dusty and crowded highway by gentle-faced Sisters. Only one young nun walked quite alone and apart, her hands crossed upon her breast: from her sweet countenance radiated happiness. A German officer, a Catholic evidently, stood by the roadside when the little procession passed: he looked curiously at the solitary figure, moving in an atmosphere of holy peace: then he understood and saluted with his sword!

'I NEVER HOPE TO SEE A BRAVER ACTION.'

The story of how a Catholic soldier—one of three brothers who joined the Army after the outbreak of war—met his death in a heroic act, is told in a letter written by the Commanding Officer to the soldier's parents. Of Private Francis Alexander Wood, of the 1st Royal Bucks, the officer says:—

'It may help to soften your grief if I tell you that he died in the performance of an act of very great