

to-night. I had not meant to—but the words came in spite of me.”

Mary pressed her face in her hands for a moment. Then she looked up and smiled faintly.

“I did try to put the children first, Phil, but—for years—I’ve loved you best, though

I didn’t know—I never guessed that you”——

“Very tenderly she held out both hands to him.

“I thought I was going to be so lonely, and all the while God had this in store for me!” she said, softly and happily.

The Oldest Church in Existence To-day

If you get your New Testaments and look at the concluding verses of the Second Epistle of St. Paul to his beloved disciple Timothy, you will read:

“Eubulus and Pudens and Linus and Claudia and all the brethren salute thee.”

Long since have they gone with the Apostle into eternal life; but a memorial of at least two, Pudens and Claudia, husband and wife, still exists in the Rome of to-day.

The house in which they lived with their sons and daughters, all later on to bear the title of Saint, whose walls held within them for seven years the Prince of the Apostles, when, as Bishop of Rome, he baptised, confirmed, and administered the Sacrament of Holy Orders, that sheltered St. Paul more than once in his stormy career, and hundreds of Christians flying from their pagan persecutors, is still standing, after all these centuries.

It is somewhat altered and enlarged, to be sure; but if some day you go to Rome and seek it out for yourselves, your feet will press the very mosaics of the pavement trodden by Peter and Paul and Pudens and Claudia. That house is now the very oldest church in existence.

Divine Worship.

It was the first place where the early Christians of Rome assembled, as we now do, for divine worship. Of course in those terrible days of persecution and terror, there could be no churches built as we now have them. Meetings were held and Mass celebrated privately, by stealth as it were, in the houses of those Christians who were fortunate enough to have space to offer.

Pudens was the first of these. He was a noble Roman Senator, converted to the faith by St. Peter himself and his devoted friend. His devotion to his Crucified Lord was even greater, and he sealed his faith in Him with his blood before long.

He was a rich and generous man, married to the Lady Claudia, a princess of Britain, then under the dominion of the Roman Emperors. She also was a Christian.

They had two sons, Novatus and Timotheus, and two beautiful daughters, Pudenziana and Praxedes, deeply attached to each other.

After the martyrdom of their father and the deaths of Claudia and their two brothers, the sisters gave all their possessions to the poor, and spent their lives in good works—visiting the sick, comforting the sorrowful, aiding those in distress and—a favorite good work—gaining possession and giving Christian burial to the bodies of numerous martyrs, thrown contemptuously to the dogs after their deaths by the executioners.

Pudens, their father, although he had become a follower of Christ, had been highly

respected and esteemed by the very men who had put him to death, and so his daughters went for years unmolested and apparently unnoticed in their course of life, so opposed to Pagan ideas.

Then Pudenziana was taken ill and died, a terrible blow to her loving sister, not only in her affections, but that now she was left entirely alone, no longer young, and in the midst of a cruel new persecution of her brethren in the faith. So she prayed to God in His mercy to take her too, and He heard her prayer.

Roman Attack.

Not long after Pudenziana’s death a great crowd of Christian assembled in the house for Mass on a certain occasion. While, unconscious of danger they knelt and prayed, Roman soldiers burst in upon them and left

none but Praxedes herself alone. This was the last pang.

A few weeks after she was reunited to her dear ones in heaven, and the family of Pudens was extinct on this earth. But their home was still used as a temple of God, and was for nearly three centuries what may be called the “Cathedral” of Rome.

Different Popes have made alterations and changes in its walls, but the original house is still there, as I have told you, the first church of Rome and now the very oldest in the world. The altar upon which St. Peter said Mass is there, too, but it has been sheathed in stone, to prevent decay. On the front of it is this inscription:

Altar of St. Peter.

“Upon this altar, St. Peter used to offer the Body and Blood of Our Lord in behalf of the living and the dead.”

When Christianity became the religion of Rome and its pagan temples were overthrown, the house of Pudens the Senator became known as the Church of St. Pudenziana, and father and daughter lie together under the high altar. Praxedes has a church of her own but a short distance from her loved ones; Claudia, Novatus, and Timotheus rest together near by, and the family of Saints await in peace the dawn of eternal day.—*Franciscan Herald*.

St. Joan of Arc’s Case and Papal Infallibility

(By M. C. L. in *New York Truth*.)

In treating of Joan of Arc a recent writer implies that her sentence and execution and subsequent canonisation prove the failure of the Papal Infallibility, and seems to be under the impression that one Pope contradicted the other in estimating the character and status of the martyred Maid of Orleans. What is the explanation?

Papal Infallibility is not compromised in the least. So far from one Pope contradicting the other, the canonisation in the 20th century of St. Joan harmonizes with the decision of the court constituted by the Pope in the 15th, when the sentence pronounced upon her by a local tribunal—under the presidency not of the Pope, but of the Bishop of Beauvais—who was not infallible—was reversed and annulled. Where is the contradiction between Pope and Pope? Father Thurston, S.J., writes that the first trial was conducted not only without reference to the Pope, but in defiance of Joan’s appeal to his Holiness. The court which reversed that decision was constituted by the Pope, and the illegality of the former proceedings made clear. Even before that “keen observers like Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini, afterwards Pope Pius II., though still in doubt as to her mission, had discerned something of the heavenly character of the Maid.” How is the Infallibility proved a failure? Very often such glib assertions are made by persons who do not know what is meant by Papal Infallibility, and without that knowledge it is impossible to arrive at sane and sound conclusions regarding it. To clear the air I quote the dogmatic definition:—

“The Roman Pontiff, when he speaks *ex cathedra*; that is, when exercising the office of pastor and doctor of all Christians, of his

supreme authority he defines a doctrine of faith or morals to be held by the whole Church, is possessed of that Infallibility with which the Divine Redeemer has willed His Church to be endowed in defining a doctrine of faith or morals; whence it follows that such definitions of the Roman Pontiff are of themselves, and not in virtue of the consent of the Church irreformable.”

As Father Ryder writes, the truth that the Pope is the centre of faith has from the beginning found expression in the acceptance of communion with Rome as a test of orthodoxy, and the acknowledgement that the Pope’s confirmation is the all-sufficient and essential seal of orthodox instruction.

“Rome has spoken, the cause is finished,” the famous crystallisation of St. Augustine’s words, illustrates that.

Perhaps the writer who called forth this explanation will tell us what the Pope had to do with the condemnation of St. Joan, and how his infallibility was involved. It is possible that the necessity of their case constrains non-Catholics to attack the Infallibility; certainly it is strange to find reasonable beings presumably in earnest about their salvation, adhering to a church which admits that it may teach them error, may lead them astray. How do they persuade themselves that a church which confessedly may teach error is the Church which Christ commissioned to teach all nations, and to which He promised the perpetual presence of the Holy Ghost, the safeguard against false doctrine? One would not trust one’s body to a guide who openly confessed that he might lead one over a precipice or into a bog. Why be less careful of the soul?