

God foresaw, that man would frequently rebel against his divine law; and, of course, unless these sinful rebellions were pardoned, the gates of heaven would be forever shut against the prevaricating rebel. The same mercy and charity which prompted the Son of God to atone for the crime of our first parents by his sufferings and thus to enable their redeemed and regenerated offspring to enter heaven, induced him as we may naturally conceive, to establish some means by which man's own personal sins against God might be cancelled. For if no means of recovering forfeited innocence were left to man, the possibility of gaining the end of his creation, and of avoiding the external punishments of sin, would be extremely limited; for sin is unfortunately very prevalent, and 'in many things we all offend.'

The means which God has left us, of recovering from sin, is universally believed and known to be repentance. If God had pleased, he might not have consented to pardon even repenting sinners at all, but he has done so; and this indulgence we owe to his mercy and goodness. Surely, then he can prescribe conditions, on which he will receive the sinner into forfeited favour, and no rational being could complain, if those conditions were far more severe than they really are. It is not in the littleness of human pride, or human self-sufficiency to enact laws for God, or to blunt the force of those which he has given to his creatures.

Catholics believe that God has left power on earth to forgive sin, and that he has delegated that power to the lawful ministers of his church; and by conceiving that application to those delegated powers, is one of the conditions in ordinary cases which are requisite for obtaining pardon, they think 'they give to God what belongs to God.' At the same time that they do not detract from the dignity of rational nature. They believe, that by the words of Jesus Christ addressed to his apostles, 'Receive ye the Holy Ghost, whose ye shall forgive they are forgiven, and whose sins you shall retain they are retained,' (St Matt. xviii. 18. St. John xx. 22, 23.) these apostles, who were the future ministers of his church received the power of remitting sin, by the authority of God. Indeed what other meaning can the words infer? This explanation of the text does not wear the least appearance of impossibility; for God could have as easily commissioned the Apostles to remit sin in his name, as to perform miracles in his name, for man in his own nature, is equally incapable of either. Indeed, it is almost universally believed by every denomination of Christians, that by the above words, the apostles did receive power to forgive sin. But the adversaries of Catholicity remark, that like other extraordinary powers communicated to them, the power of remitting sin died

when the church was substantially established. 'God gave power to the apostles,' they say 'to perform miracles, and if the present ministers of the Catholic Church claim the power of absolution, through the apostles, why should they not claim the power of working miracles? The second they cannot assert, so neither ought they to claim the first prerogative.' The force of this objection is completely annihilated, when we reflect that the common power of performing miracles was essentially necessary at the commencement of Christianity. Miracles were the ordinary means which Christ and the first champions of Christianity used to convert the Pagan and the Infidel, and even in modern times, upon similar occasions, the same means have been employed, by the confession of Protestants themselves; (vide Life of St. Xavier, juxt. fin.) but the power of absolution is at least as necessary now as it was in the Apostolic age. Wherever or whenever sin is committed, the power is necessary, or if it be not, then we must acknowledge, that that power was foolishly given to the Apostles. The same remark will apply with equal energy to every objection founded on the non existence of extraordinary powers in the present ministers of the church. Every thing which was necessary in the Apostolic age, may not be necessary now. But there are many prerogatives in the ministry, which are equally necessary during both periods. Among the rest the power of absolution and consecration hold a high station.— We are sinners now, as our predecessors were then; and we should consider ourselves very unfortunate, if our ministers had not inherited the same delegated power of absolution, which the Apostles, who were their ministers, had received from their Lord and master.

It were no difficult task to adduce other proofs in defence of the power of absolution, particularly from the authority of universal tradition. More than sufficient historical evidence is left us, to prove, that from the earliest ages of the church sacramental penance has always existed among the great body of christians. This authority, and the proofs founded upon it, ought not to be lightly contemned by our adversaries; for they should remember, that many important truths and facts, both ecclesiastical and civil, rest exclusively on this basis.

Having established the power of absolution let us proceed to the details of the subject. Believing that their ministers possess the delegated power of absolution, when certain conditions are present Catholics deem penance a sacrament of the new law; or, an outward sign of inward grace instituted by Christ for our justification. (Vide Cat. Conc. Trid. de Sac. § 5. and St Aug.) They believe that contrition, confession, and sanctification, are