

The casuists first let down morality from enthusiasm to reason; then lower it down to the level of general frailty, until it be at last sunk in loose accommodation to weakness, and even vice" (1).

Abuse possible, but provided against.

It would be idle to pretend that there is no danger of this abuse ever occurring. "The Jesuits," as Sir James goes on to tell us, "were the casuists of the seventeenth century." The General Congregations of the Order in that and the following century passed repeated decrees against "novelties and laxities of opinion in matters of moral." It is not the wont of these Congregations to legislate against wholly imaginary dangers. But there is a higher authority in the Catholic Church, ever vigilant to prevent the keen intellects of Moral Professors from whittling away the law which they are set to expose. No great extravagance of casuistry will ever go unrebuked at Rome. And the rebuke is written down and preserved as a warning to future generations. Innocent the Eleventh in 1679 condemned sixty-five moral axioms together as lax or loosely worded. Here are some of them:

"With a cause it is lawful to take an oath without any intention of swearing, as well in trifles as in grave matters."

"He satisfies the Church's precept of hearing Mass, who hears two parts of it, or even four together, said by different Celebrants at the same time."

"It is lawful to steal, not only in extreme but even in grave necessity."

No Professor of Casuistry in a Catholic Seminary, who valued his place, would venture to teach any proposition that had ever been condemned at Rome.

The Church ever vigilant.

The Church has every reason for watching with jealous eyes over what we may call the purity of casuistry. For as cases are solved in her schools, so are they decided in her confessionals: the one is a preparation for the other. And the confessional is a vital organ of the Catholic Church. Where it works healthily, she flourishes and thrives: where it is out of order and ceases to act normally, her very existence is there threatened. And this lets us into the reason why casuistry is unpopular in England: it is unpopular as the confessional is unpopular. The study of the law is wrapped in the same cloud of odium which rests upon the court where that law is administered. It came very well from Pascal and other writers of Jansenist proclivities to lampoon casuists and turn casuistry into a byword of reproach: this same school virtually abolished the confessional also, by making it to be really under their direction, what the heretics at the time of the Council of Trent had mendaciously styled it, a *carnificina conscientiarum*, "a torture-chamber of consciences." (2)

(1) *Memoirs*, i. p. 411.

(2) *Conc. Trid. Sess. 14, c. 5.*