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The Associate Editor can be found daily between 9 a.m. and 12, at the Branch Office, 493 Main Street, Winnipeg, opposite City Hall.

LENT.

III.—SECRET SINS.

TEMPTATIONS to sin are many and various. Great sins force themselves upon our remembrance. Besetting sins we are all conscious of. But there are many sins of which we take no note. Of these, perhaps, the most dangerous and far-reaching are secret sins. David prays, "O cleanse Thou me from my secret faults." Here he does not merely mean sins that are hidden from others. He means those which he himself knows not. The Levitical Law contained an atonement for secret sins. The Gospel can do no less.

But it is clear that this truth opens a new window into the soul. It suggests a tremendous range of possible sin. It forces us to confess how far we all must be from being able to save ourselves. It drives us straightway to the Cross. And the season of Lent requires, among other things, a diligent self examination of sins secret to us, but which by self-sifting may be found out; and acts of sorrow and self-condemnation for those which, after all our care, we are unable to discover, and which yet cause the Redeemer's Passion.

The Litany asks God to forgive us for sins, negligences, and ignorances. This division is strictly correct. Sins are wrong things that we do knowing them to be wrong: giving way to temptation when we know it is temptation; negligences are when we do wrong for want of proper care, but without deliberately yielding to temptation; and ignorances are when we do wrong without so much as knowing that it is wrong at all. The danger of these last lies in the very fact that they are ignorances.

But can we be reasonably held responsible for secret faults? Can a just God take vengeance on one who is ignorant of his sins? Does not the ignorance excuse the guilt? A little thought will shew that for sins of ignorance we are justly liable.

1. We commit a sin. THE SIN IS WRONG WHETHER WE KNOW IT OR NOT.

Of course it is not the same kind of sin which it would have been if we had deliberately committed it with our eyes open. But it is very evident that the essential wrongness of the act is not affected by the state of our knowledge or ignorance about it. The ignorance of an earthly law is not held to be an excuse for breaking it. Why should it be for a heavenly? But, further, it is just those things which we do without knowing or thinking whether they are right or wrong which shew what we ourselves really are. Here is an unselfish person. He

exhausts himself in kind actions; he gives up time, inclination, pleasure, money, in the endeavour to do good and to help others. He never thinks of himself. Least of all does he know his own selfishness. Yet every one but himself can plainly see it. On the contrary, a thoroughly selfish person does not mean or desire to be thoughtless of other people's just claims, but because he is selfish, penetrated through and through with the sin of selfishness, he is constantly doing unkind, inconsiderate, exacting things, that is, sins of selfishness, without so much as knowing it. Every one knows his sin but himself; every one else despises his littleness of mind, and chafes against his contemptible conduct. But he goes along all unconscious, cutting, and wounding, and trampling on others without a thought of his own criminal guilt. In a world, where by God's providence we are so much dependent on each other, such a being is fit for nothing but to be chained in a solitary cell where he can hurt no one, and where he is dependent on the kindness of his keepers. Do not such things as these need forgiveness? Is there no sin in them? God looks upon what a man is; and of all the sins we commit, perhaps none tell more surely what we are than those which we do without knowing that we do them.

2. AGAIN, WE MIGHT KNOW BETTER. We are responsible for our irresponsibility. The ignorance of our sin is itself a sin. No Christian need be ignorant. We often overlook this. David did not. The Psalm quoted shews that he knew that ignorance was no excuse. For what is God's Word given us but this very thing, that we should not be ignorant? The Law of the Lord converteth the soul; the testimony of the Lord giveth wisdom to the ignorant. And so David all through the Psalm, from v. 7, is singing the praises of God's Word—the Holy Scriptures—because of this very thing, that it can and does remove our ignorance. I am ignorant. God's Word can make me wise. My soul is turned towards evil. God's Word converts my soul, turns it towards good. And then David, knowing that he has not used God's Word as fully as he ought, cries out, "O cleanse Thou me from my secret faults," for Thou only canst.

There are, then, two things to be forgiven, the sin itself, and our ignorance of it; for our ignorance is our own fault. Ignorance means neglect of God's Word, and that is a sin. Ignorance means rejection of God's Holy Spirit, and that is a sin. We need then the cry of the Royal Psalmist every day of our lives.

Of these secret sins some have the nature of presumption, some are truly secret. Of the first class are sins committed in ignorance where knowledge might have been had. Of this the Jews are an instance, who would not receive Christ as the Messiah, though their own prophet clearly and circumstantially foretold of His arrival, and gave minute signs whereby He might be identified. For this ignorance they were deeply guilty. St. Paul's conduct before his conversion is another case in point. He sinned, yet did it conscientiously, though he could see afterwards how blind he had been. Next, there are sins committed in ignorance through known sins, such as those done in passion or in drunkenness. An angry man may not know the amount of sin he does: but he does know that indulged anger will bring sorrow. So a drunken man may be unaware of the deadly blow given while in his frenzy, but he does know that drunkenness is a sin.

Sins of ignorance that are truly secret are, for

instance, such as are passed away from the memory, though known at the time they were committed. A penitent coming to himself will remember many past sins, but not all, even of his wilful sins. These are secret to him. A chance word or a accidental circumstance may bring a train of thought that will unearth many a long forgotten sin; yet there must be many which he will never recall. Thank God for the precious blood of Christ which cleanseth from all sin!

There are, finally, secret sins which attach to the purest obedience. "In many things we offend all." St. Paul says "I know nothing by myself" (i.e., I have nothing on my conscience), "yet am I not thereby justified." And what thoughtful man would care to rest his hope of salvation on his best and holiest day!

These thoughts would be appalling; they would sink us in despair, did we not know that a sincere and hearty repentance and a lively faith will lead us to the only source of pardon. This is our only ray of comfort in looking on the dark past. "This is the will of God, even our sanctification." We may not cease our efforts to do his will; but our daily devotion must ever include the prayer—

"O CLEANSE THOU ME FROM MY SECRET FAULTS."

"BROAD-CHURCHISM."

THE *Wesleyan* says:—"The *Christian World* seems of the opinion that Broad-Churchism in the Church of England has possibly been carried too far. It says, 'When Churchmen have discovered that the Church has room for all parties, and that there is nothing worth fighting about, they may then wake up to the further discovery that the world has come to the conclusion that they have no message to which it is at all worth while to listen. It is the creeping paralysis of indifference which is one of the great and threatening perils of the hour.'"

We are afraid such comments emanate from persons predisposed to believe anything and everything of evil concerning the Church. It is in part the theory by which the dissenting bodies seek to explain the large influx of their ministers into the Church, not being sufficiently unprejudiced to seek further for the cause of the large defection from their ranks. By what authority do the *Christian World* or the *Wesleyan* make such statements, or what proofs have they to sustain their charges? It is strikingly noticeable that when a man imbibes Romish errors on the one hand, or denies some truth of Scripture on the other, he leaves the Church and goes elsewhere. He finds that as an honest man he cannot teach and preach his views, and continue to read the Liturgy which enforces or repudiates the doctrines which he denies or would add, and so he seeks a home elsewhere.

The Church in this differs more widely from the various Protestant bodies than they are aware, in that she leaves it to no man to fix the doctrines he should teach his flock: She has standards fixed and well defined and easily known, and by these standards—as Dissenters themselves have frequently acknowledged—the laity may always know what the Church's teaching upon any given subject is, and even should the clergy err, the people have the doctrines of orthodoxy as the Church holds them, inculcated and enforced in the Prayer Book services, so that ignorantly they cannot be led astray. But there is not a single point which the *Christian World* enumerates which cannot be shown to be out of harmony with the facts. The