

The Unpardonable Offense and the Pardonable.

MARCUS MANSFIELD.

The world of ethics abounds in strange phenomena just as does the world of physics; though the marvellous in both cases loses all traces of inconsistency when once the final explanations are made. The miraculous is a mere unevicenced nook of the human understanding, just as are the seeming incongruities of all natural law. There is a unity in all things, were we only able to establish it, to our own comfort of body, mind, and soul. And the clashing phases of ethics, which seemingly make an offense of some act of body, mind, or soul an unpardonable offense in one case and a pardonable offense in another, arise only from our habitual way of looking at things, on account of our unevicenced conceptions, or the limits of our intellectual or spiritual ken.

The above, of course, is intolerable language to the ordinary newspaper reader, and these letters are supposed to be addressed to such, if to anybody. The other day a young man while out rifle-shooting, desired to make the highest score possible, as all marksmen naturally do. And his ambition would have been realized but for an unfortunate "outer" he happened to make, instead of a "bull's eye." In his disappointment, he, impulsively it is thought, said something or other to the target-keeper, which was afterwards construed into asking the latter to accept a bribe to change the score in order to satisfy the demands of a marksman's ambition; and the community, in which the incident occurred, has been in a state of indignant ferment against such conduct ever since. The Rifle Association, to which the young man belonged, forthwith met and cut off the accused from taking part in any possible future rifle contests under its auspices. The thing he had committed was declared to be unpardonable.

Again, a decent respectable citizen in one of our cities, who was a member of one of its curling clubs, once became tired of the stereotyped recurrence of the list of officers from year to year, and having some ambitions to see his name on the printed record of the club's prominent, undertook, as scrutineer, to drop a substitute ballot, or one or two as it was said, in his own favour, while the tally was being made out. A comparing of votes afterwards, among the members who had voted, brought the discrepancy to light; and the poor man, though he had never been known to do a mean act before, was quietly asked to resign, and was never allowed to throw a curling stone on the rinks of the club for the remaining twenty years of his life, though he was an enthusiastic curler and the member of the most enthusiastic family of curlers in the town. Though he had been looked upon as being as popular as any of the ordinary members of the club, with a family connection on the executive, the thing he had done was irreconcilable, looked upon as an unpardonable offense.

These are two cases taken at haphazard, and now two others may be selected in the same way.

A minister of the gospel, one of the most popular in his district, once became mixed up in a case of indiscreet action, in which there was no way of getting at the whole truth of the matter, made open confession that he had counselled one of his own people to do a wrong thing, and had himself been engaged in margin speculation. There was indignation and indignation over the revelations, indignation against the confessed mis-

conduct of the minister and indignation against those who were indignant at the minister. There was no unanimity in the indignation however, as there was in the secular cases cited above. In these there was not a dissentient voice, not even among the personal friends of the men involved. In a word the minister had confessed to a moral offense that was quite pardonable, and what is more, the Presbytery gave him a clean record-certificate when he left the parish for another charge. There was nothing unpardonable to be found in the good man's confession.

Another case. An elder of the church, who was well known as an unwavering party man, became one of the candidate's agents during an election contest. Towards the end of the contest the emulation of faction lost patience, and in the heat of polling day, master elder was seen running around with a bunch of bank-bills in his hand, entering into conversation with sundry undecided voters: and, when the election was protested, the evidence in the court proved conclusively that the church official had bribed several of his more needy neighbours to vote for the candidate for whom he was canvassing. Was the elder debarred from his church duties? Did he lose any of his quasi-religious influence? Not a bit. There was found nothing unpardonable about the offense of his using bribes at an election time, nay, rather only something to be joked about.

Of course, one can hardly credit, in cold blood, that such contradiction in the moral judgments of men is possible. The soul of things is just. The fault must be with the recorder of the incidents. The writer must have been mistaken. The discrepancy is in his statements, not in the inconsistency of the *vox populi* which is, or ought to be, the *vox dei*.

The cases, however, have honestly been presented with no other intention than to provide a basis of argument in favour of a mission of moral reform, in which cleric and layman may group themselves under one banner. The public conscience requires rectifying. The fashion of things has brought its idiosyncracies into the moral life of the people as into its social. The individual conscience is one thing, the conscience of the community is another thing. The pardonable and unpardonable have become mixed up in general ethics as have the conventional and the unconventional in fashionable life. The moral ken of the public has to be widened out, even unto the eternal precepts of God's own law which is perfect, with no misgiving to any one placing himself under its obligations.

Protestantism in Austria.

The statistics of the conversions from Roman Catholicism to Protestantism for the second quarter of this year in Bohemia are published in the last number of the "Evangelsche Kirchenzeitung fur Oesterreich." They amount to 342, and are distributed pretty evenly over all parts of Bohemia in which the movement has shown itself, the North-West congregations still taking the lead. It has to be remembered that these statistics do not include the children between the ages of seven and fourteen in families that have transferred themselves from the Roman Catholic to the Protestant churches. A father may register his children under the age of seven in any church he joins, and the children, when they reach the age of fourteen, may transfer themselves to another church. But between the ages of

seven and fourteen the Austrian law does not allow the religion of any person to be changed, or at least to be registered as changed. Nor do these statistics make any reference to the thousands of Austrians who habitually attend Protestant churches, and are only restrained from proclaiming themselves converts from fear of the persecution or dismissal from employment it would involve.

Sir,—I am glad to see that Dr. Clancy, Roman Catholic Bishop of Elphin, proposes the entire closing of public houses in Ireland on the 17th of March, now a statutory holiday in that kingdom. This is a wise suggestion, and I should like to see it extended to all public holidays in this Dominion, as well as in the Motherland. What man, who loves God or his fellows, can fail to lament that intemperance, which seems almost inseparable from public festivities? Can it not be stopped? I think it can to a very great degree, and that the present is a fitting time for vigorous action. Every province, but one, has signified its desire that the liquor traffic should be shorn of its opportunities for evil, and from the utterances of such leaders of our French-Canadian fellow countrymen, I do not believe that Quebec would be an exception in upholding the reproach of drunkenness from days set apart nominally for the glory of God and the edification of the Church.

ULSTER PAT.

The London county council banishes alcohol from all the institutions under its control, revokes all the licenses falling into its hands under the street improvement and rehousing plans, prohibits holding inquests in saloons, and restricts the sale of liquors at places of amusement. This is a long step in the right direction.

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