

fault, and especially to the breach of ecclesiastical regulations which their own order had formulated in the supposed interest of religion, and the importance of which they were inclined very naturally to exaggerate. As the public administration of the discipline in the greater number of cases thus created ceased to be of general interest and was no longer found to be for edification, the clergy yielded to the natural desire of their penitents to have the dealing in private rather than in public. This, of course, deprived the process of some of its dignity and seriousness, but gave it the appearance of being more kindly and Christ-like. Since, however, the clergy had by this time shaken themselves free from the check of lay assessors in the administration of discipline, the change opened the door to a long train of abuses, such as could not possibly have been dreamed of at the outset. It transformed the discipline of the church into the institution of the confessional, and when it finally became compulsory on all the faithful to make a confession at least once a year, there was placed in the hands of the clergy one of the most terrible engines of tyranny that the ingenuity of the world has ever devised. Of course, it is not wholly evil or it could not have maintained itself at all through so many centuries, in the two largest sections of Christendom, the Greek and Latin churches. But it has been the fruitful mother of countless scandals and has kept the masses of the people in a state of permanent tutelage fatal to all genuine progress.

I have no desire, however, to dwell on the sad history of the confessional. For our present purpose it is more important to notice the influence which it had on the development of ethical thought within the church.

On the one hand it must be set down to its credit that the institution of the confessional has led to very great prominence being given to ethical questions in the training of the clergy and in the literature of the churches which maintain it. Inasmuch as the clergy are called upon to hear the constant confessions of their people and adjudicate on the discipline to be imposed for all degrees of fault, as well as to