

had feigned to be reconciled. The list of April 30th, of the following year, contains sixty names, that of the first Sunday in May fifty-four. During the single month of May, of the year 1687, four hundred and ninety seven persons were *reconciled* to the Church, which they had seemed to abandon."

I apprehend that Dr. Beaven's idea of the *reconciliation* of penitents, whatever may have been the character of their offence, by the hands of the *Ministry*, corresponds, essentially, with what is here described.

In England such remains of this discipline as yet exist in any formal shape, are matters very much reserved to the Ecclesiastical Courts. Among ourselves any particular regulations which may be required upon the subject, will fall within the province of our Synods.

The parts respectively taken by the Clergy and Laity in the acts of excommunication and re-admission, (for it appears that the Laity bore a share in them) according to Apostolic usage, and that which still prevailed in several succeeding ages, are thus stated by Whitby, one of our best and most learned commentators, in his note upon 2, Cor. ii, 6.

"In the primitive Church, when any person was to be excommunicated, the laity were first consulted about the fact, the guilty person pleaded in their presence: they judged of the matter of fact, as do our juries in criminal causes, and by their suffrage they consented to his condemnation, as St. Cyprian doth often inform us: but then he still asserts, that neither they, nor the inferior clergy could pass the sentence of excommunication without the Bishop, who, as the president of the Assembly, still pronounced the sentence. They also consented to re-admission of them into favor, and to the communion of the Church; but then their actual admission was performed by the imposition of the hands of the Bishop and clergy, the power of the keys, such he being given to them by Christ, saying, Thou art Peter, &c."

Nothing, certainly, can be more opposed to the Gospel than to make one human being dependent for the welfare of his soul, upon any arbitrary power or supposed authority which works like a *charm* residing in another. Nothing more opposed to the sentiment and practice of the primitive Church, than what Archbishop Ussher, as quoted by Chillingworth, (both maintaining the legitimate power of the keys) calls "this new pick-lock of *sacramental confession* obtruded upon men's consciences as necessary to salvation, by the Canons of the late conventicle of Trent, in the 14 Session." A Minister may help his brother in spiritual difficulties and pronounce him in peace with the Church: it is a feature of the Ministerial office: he may preserve the Church from scandal by an authoritative exclusion from privileges, and his ministerial acts, rightly and reasonably exercised according to the received rules of the Church, carry