

JANUARY 25, 1890.

the Church of Christ as our guide to divine truth, which will never lead us astray.

The infallibility of this Church, which is clearly taught in these passages, is questioned by Protestants, indeed, but few are rash enough to deny that at least during the first three or four centuries she retained the purity of doctrine which was handed down by the Apostles. If she did not do so, the promises of Christ to remain with His Church to the end of time, and that the gates of hell should not prevail against her, were vain and meaningless—which it would be blasphemous to assert to have been the case.

It was with this conviction that the High Church clergy searched into the records of the past, and found that the doctrines which Protestantism rejected were taught in the ages when the purity of the Church's teaching is undeniable. Even from the writings of the three early Christians, Tertullian, Origen, and St. Cyprian, all the doctrines which Protestants have maintained to be innovations and corruptions, may be shown to have been the teaching of the Church in their day: Transubstantiation, Prayers for the dead, the Invocation of saints, and that the saints pray for us, the Sacrifice of the Mass, the priestly power of absolution, the infallibility of the Church's teaching, are all unequivocally taught by these Fathers of the Church, not as merely their own fanciful theories, but as the undoubted belief of the Church from the time of the Apostles. When to these testimonies those of numerous other Christian writers of the same period, and of the fourth century are added, we have a mass of testimony which proves to demonstration the apostolic origin of these doctrines. It was by the study of these writings that the High Church clergy discovered that Protestantism swept away the fundamental truths of religion which had been taught by Christ to the Apostles, and which they transmitted to their successors.

It is for this reason also that the High Church party find the name of Protestantism to be odious and un-Christian. Christianity is based upon positive doctrine, and not upon protesting against such teaching, and we need not be surprised that the Bishop of Milwaukee said recently that the title of the "Protestant Episcopal Church" of the United States has become so odious that it had not a single defender in the recent Episcopal Church Congress held in Washington. That Church is tired of a name which is self-condemnatory, though the Guardian speaks of it as if it were the greatest glory of the Christian. This is surely the height of inconsistency in one who professes to found his religion on the Bible, which speaks indeed of the necessity of faith as the substance of things to be hoped for, and the conviction of things that appear not, but never as a protest or negation.

The Guardian's article next says: "there is a growing tendency in some quarters to belittle, or at least to attempt to apologize for Protestantism, a kind of half-apologetic interpretation of some of its glorious scenes and triumphs, and an utter lack of faith and expectancy for anything like its baptism of power and its marvellous victories."

Pentecost is the fulfillment of Christ's promise that He would send the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, to teach His Apostles all truth. It was certainly a marvel of divine power, but does not the Guardian fall into the class of belittlers of that glorious coming of the Holy Ghost, when it denies that the descent of the Holy Ghost upon the Apostles had any effect in keeping the Church of God in the "faith once delivered to the saints?"

Before concluding our remarks upon this subject we must enter our protest against the custom of the so-called Evangelical Churchmen to abuse Catholics whenever they have a word to say concerning the Ritualists. The Ritualists have reached their conclusions in the exercise of their private judgment, which Protestant controversialists assert they have the right to use and are under obligation to obey. The disputes of High and Low Churchmen should therefore be settled among themselves, as a family quarrel, with which Catholics have nothing to do. We are justified in drawing the inference that the Evangelicals abuse Catholics in this connection because they may thus gain a certain amount of sympathy from those thoughtless people who are always gratified to hear such abuse. They draw a red herring across the path to conceal the fact that they are unable to refute the Ritualists by valid argument. This is evidently what all our Brother of the Guardian.

AURICULAR CONFESSION.

Rev. Father Drummond Replies to Ven. Archdeacon Fortin, of Holy Trinity Church, on the Subject of Auricular Confession.

Winnipeg Tribune, January 16, 1890.

St. Mary's church was crowded to the doors Sunday evening by people anxious to hear Rev. Father Drummond, S. J., reply to the sermon of Ven. Archdeacon Fortin, of Holy Trinity church (church of England) on the practices of auricular confession. The text and substance of the sermon are as follows:

John xx, 23: "Whosoever sins ye shall forgive, they are forgiven unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain they are retained."

Having undertaken to defend the practice of auricular confession, I feel like a boy that figured in a fairy tale I read in my youth. He was straight and well-made and as he passed through the land of the hunchbacks, where every man, woman and child had a hump on his or her back, they pointed their fingers at him and called out jeeringly "look at the straight-back." Similarly considering as I do the practice of auricular confession to be one of the most admirable traits of Catholic life it seems to me very odd that it should be singled out as a point for attack. The hump of sin which confession smooths away is treated as if it were something to be gloried in, while the process of smoothing away is condemned; and curiously enough those who condemn the "straight-backs," to keep up our parable, do so with very serious limitations. They seem to say that "straight-backs" are all very well once in a while, but that if they were to become too common it would be a terrible misfortune.

PROTESTANT INCONSISTENCY. Here is a case in point. A little more than a month ago Archdeacon Fortin preached a sermon on auricular confession, the first part of which consisted in the praise of confession. He quotes the Church of England morning and evening prayer:

"If we say that we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us; but if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

In confession the archdeacon includes (and in doing so contradicts himself) not only confession to God but also confession to man. "Somebody," he says, "has wronged a neighbor it may be, and he does not see how peace is to be restored. He wants advice—he wants a friend, a mediator, who will hold out the olive branch to the companion of happier days. He goes to his clergyman and opens his grief to him." "Or, again," continues the archdeacon, "some doctrinal trouble vexes his soul. He cannot harmonize the providences of God with the doctrine of His infinite love and goodness. What is the proper course in such a case? Clearly it is to seek the aid of those who are familiar with such questions. Now the confession that is allowed in the Church of England proceeds on these lines. It is the most natural thing in the world."

So far I agree perfectly with the archdeacon. It is the most natural thing in the world to confess one's sins, but what I cannot for the life of me see is that, being such a good thing, such a blessed thing, it should suddenly become immoral because it is done regularly and scientifically. The archdeacon's argument may be summed up in this way. Auricular confession is sometimes excellent because it is performed sporadically and under the impulse of sentiment, but as soon as auricular confession becomes obligatory and covers the whole field of sinfulness it straightway becomes "this pernicious and monstrous custom which we reject and repudiate with abhorrence."

What would you think of a man who should say "roast beef is delicious, provided you eat it after a week's fast and only very rarely, but if you make a practice of eating it regularly, say once a day, and especially if your physician obliges you to eat it once a day, it becomes rank poison." This may seem a ridiculous travesty of the archdeacon's argument, but it is really a mere translation of it into other terms. Of course that translation shows that there is not in his contention any rational process to which the term argument could be applied.

EVIL EFFECTS CATEGORICALLY DENIED. But what reason does the Archdeacon give to support so extraordinary a contention? These are his words: "we reject (obligatory auricular confession) because its tendency and uniform effects are deeply injurious to morality. God has wisely so constituted the human mind that its thoughts and feelings can be known to others only by its voluntary acts. In this sanctuary certain clergy claim the right to enter." Thus his first reason is that the tendency of auricular confession and its uniform effects are deeply injurious to morality. This I most absolutely and categorically deny. On the contrary I maintain, and all Catholics will support me in this contention, that the tendency and uniform effects of auricular confession are the strongest bulwark of morality in the world. Which of these assertions seems to you the more natural conclusion from the Archdeacon's premises?

If, as he holds, auricular confession, when voluntary, is an excellent thing, how can the mere fact of its becoming obligatory render it deeply injurious to morality? Does it not rather seem that if it is really an excellent remedy, the oftener it is applied to a case of disease the greater will be the consequent benefit to mankind.

THE CONFESSIONAL GUARDED. But the Archdeacon has another objection to it. He says that certain clergy claim the right to have revealed to them the most secret thoughts and feelings, "however female modesty may shrink from the recital." I will presently explain that the Catholic clergy claim no right in this matter except what Scripture lays upon them, but before proceeding to state the proofs of the Catholic position, I must clear away, first of all, an objection which to superficial minds may have seemed a rather plausible one in the Archdeacon's mouth. He says:

"Some of the questions contained in standard Roman works, such as Liguori, to be propounded to penitents, are such as I dare not mention before this congregation. They are polluting in the extreme, and the marvel is that self-respecting men can allow their wives and daughters to be dragged through this mass of filth. Questions are often asked of young people which are a perfect revelation to them, and open up a vista of corruption, a depth of iniquity hitherto unknown to them."

A SERIES OF REPLIES. The first remark I would make on this passage is: The Archdeacon's knowledge of Liguori and other standard Catholic theologians is extremely fragmentary and apparently borrowed at second hand from authors whose anti-Catholic bias makes their books a series of misrepresentations.

My second remark is that it is a fundamental principle, taught in all our books of moral theology, that in matters of purity no question should ever be asked that teaches the penitent anything as yet unknown, and if there is any doubt as to the prudence of the question, that question should not be asked.

My third remark is that the very same exception has been taken by atheists to the Bible as is taken by the Archdeacon and his fellow maligners to Catholic theology. There is no kind of crime treated of in our moral theology but such as is minutely described in the authorized version of the Bible. There is this difference, however, that in Catholic theology such wickedness is specified in chastely guarded Latin, whereas in the authorized version it is set forth in what to open sensitive minds appears as too painfully explicit English. But the Bible and theology are protected by the same spirit that pervades both. None but the perversely reprobate could derive harm from the language of either. Vice in both is depicted in a manner which makes it, not attractive, but loathsome.

MISUNDERSTOOD BOOKS MISLEADING.

My fourth remark is: Books are very misleading especially when misunderstood. No man living in a country, amidst people who can tell him all about it, will rely on travellers' tales related in a language which he only imperfectly understands. He will question the natives. This the Archdeacon has evidently failed to do, or he would never have made the absurdly false assertion that "questions are often asked of young people, which open up a vista of corruption, in depth of iniquity, hitherto unknown to them." The Archdeacon has many Roman Catholic acquaintances. He was once a Roman Catholic himself, and no doubt frequently confessed his sins. Why did he not give us a leaf from his experience or consult some of his Catholic friends? How is it that no Catholic ever complains to the world that he or she has thus been corrupted? No Catholic, I say, except the disreputable horde of ex-priests who have been expelled from Catholic dioceses for immorality or drunkenness, or both.

THE EXCEPTION ONLY PROVES THE RULE.

My fifth remark is suggested by these last words. There are unfortunately, as there always have been and no doubt always will be, some bad priests, who use the sacrament of confession for the damnation of souls, but there never was a good thing that could not be abused. In fact the holiest of things are those that are most abused. "Corruptio optimi pessima." Religion itself has been, is, and always will be prostituted by bad men to the vilest ends. Must we, therefore, condemn all religion? As well might we ask, if all bank notes should be burnt because there are many counterfeit notes in circulation. Unscrupulous ex-priests are the authors of this abominable and ubiquitous slander against the confessional. They know that a certain class of Protestants will believe anything about Papiasts, and so they stuff them with a congeries of lies like "The Priest, the Woman and the Confessional," and "Fifty years in the Church of Rome," books in which the author generalizes his own secret crimes and draws his facts from his own lecherous imagination. Doubtless the ministry of the confessional has its dangers, but the priest is so surrounded by interior and exterior safeguards that he cannot fall from grace unless he be wilfully unfaithful to that grace and unless he rashly seek out the occasions of sin.

My sixth remark is this. If auricular confession must be tabooed because a few bad priests desecrate it, so long as they are not found out and expelled from the ministry, then all physicians should, for a still stronger reason, be shunned. For assuredly, where one priest misuses the confessional, there are ten doctors who betray, by word or deed, the confidence of their patients. Do people therefore give up consulting doctors? No; they simply shun the bad, the unscrupulous ones. And the parallel is perfect. Just as the physician must ask delicate questions, for the cure of the body, so must the priest sometimes inquire into the most shameful diseases of the soul, and in such cases if female modesty has not shrunk from the commission of certain sins,

neither should it shrink from the confession thereof. Thanks, however, to the physical and moral safeguards of the priest's life and the laws governing the confessional, the danger of contamination is far less for the priest than for the physician. If Archdeacon Fortin and men of his stamp were consistent they ought to institute a royal commission to examine what questions physicians put to their patients.

IS THE WILL SURRENDERED?

The Archdeacon proceeds, "One of the worst features of auricular and systematic confession, is that the mind and will are slavishly surrendered and placed in the keeping of another. The man gradually becomes the tool, the mere shadow of another." This again is, to any average, honest Catholic—and I invite those who are not Catholics to test my assertion by questioning their Catholic friends—is absurdly untrue. The priest to whom the confession is made very often does not know his penitent and it frequently happens that the penitent does not know the name of the priest to whom he confesses. He confesses to one priest here in Winnipeg one day, several months after to another in Montreal, later still to another in London, another in Bombay, another in Melbourne. Of which of all these confessors is he the slave? Of none. They all give him the same advice, because they have all studied the same theology. They are all acting as impersonal representatives of God. If the penitent is the slave of any one, he is the slave of God Himself and of His law, which he finds everywhere the same. I am fifty years old. I have been at confession at least three thousand times to fifty or sixty different priests in different parts of the world. Most of them are dead. Of which one am I the slave? No, they have each and every one brought to my soul a fuller measure of that truth which alone can make me free.

THE STATE OF LATIN COUNTRIES.

Consequently all the Archdeacon's tirade about the "crumbling away" of Latin countries is mere rhetoric. If Latin countries are crumbling away it is because a large part of their population is giving up the practice of confession, through the influence of atheism and immorality. For it is a fact which anyone can ascertain for himself, that Catholics who go to confession regularly are remarkable for their morality, while those who give up the confessional are liable to lapse into infidelity, or at least, carelessness about morals. And, after all, the Latin countries, which the Archdeacon abuses so roundly, are still the happiest people on the globe. There is more cheerfulness, sprightliness and general peace of mind at this very moment in Mexico, the United States of Columbia, Spain, the Catholic parts of Ireland, the Catholic parishes of Canada, than in all the Protestant countries of the world. The supremacy of money and of armies is no scriptural test of virtue. On the other hand the countries that have given up auricular confession are a prey to divorce, child murder and suicide. In the very number of the Tribune which contained the report of the Archdeacon's sermon the announcement was made that in a Protestant party of Germany, in the space of ten years, 400 children had committed suicide. These were public school children, who never confessed to a priest. Such crimes are extremely rare in Catholic countries.

DISTINCTION BETWEEN MORTAL AND VENIAL SINS.

The Archdeacon professes to quote from Liguori's moral theology. Has he ever seen it? I have my doubts, or he would surely have given some explicit reference. The work is in six volumes. How am I to find the passage he pretends to quote? However, I will examine his passage, for what it is worth, premising a few remarks about the difference between mortal and venial sins.

When the Archdeacon exclaims in ill-forgotten horror at this distinction he does not seem to be aware that he is flying in the face of his own Book of Common Prayer, which, in the Visitation of the Sick, says: "Here shall the sick person be moved to make a special confession of his sins, if he feel his conscience troubled with any weighty matter." Now this "weighty matter," which the Archdeacon objects to, implies that there are other offences that are not weighty and thus implicitly recognizes the distinction between mortal and venial sin.

"The Catholic Dictionary," a recognized authority, says:

"The Church holds that justification consists in a real renewal of man's nature by the grace of Christ, and cannot therefore admit that one who is in friendship with a holy God is guilty of sins which in their own nature expose him to eternal death. The fact of justification implies a passage from death to life, from sin to holiness. On the other hand the Church in accordance with the plainest statements of Scripture and tradition (James iii. 2; 1 John i. 5 and v. 16) has defined (Council of Trent, session 6, canon 23) that no one, not even the most holy, can avoid sin altogether "except by a special privilege of God, as the Church holds concerning the Blessed Virgin." Hence by inevitable consequence it follows that some sins are mortal, others venial. There is an analogy between human friendship and that of the soul with God, and just as some offences are sufficient to destroy friendship entirely, while others weaken it, so there are some sins which destroy, others which do but weaken the grace and love of God in the soul. There are some sins of which St. Paul says (Gal. v. 21) that they "who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God," and these must be distinct from less serious faults which we can entirely avoid. This is the

basis of the distinction between mortal and venial sins."

The principle of this distinction is recognized in the courts of law. Petty larceny is never visited with the same penalty as burglary or forgery. Nothing could be more immoral in its tendency than the lumping together of the greatest of crimes with the smallest misdemeanors. But it must not be forgotten that venial sins, in the eyes of Catholic theology, the greatest of all evils after mortal sin, worse than physical death.

LIGUORI'S MORAL THEOLOGY.

Now for the quotation from Liguori: "If a man has stolen a valuable thing, then he is guilty of mortal sin, but if he has stolen a small amount at different times, it is only a venial sin; but if all these small thefts in the aggregate amount to a valuable thing, he is bound to restore the last theft, whilst he may retain the former ones."

I have searched in vain through the six volumes of Liguori for this passage. It would have been easy for the Archdeacon to give us the number of the paragraph, but he has done no such thing. Consequently all that I can do is to examine the passage on its merits. To steal a valuable thing is certainly a mortal sin. To steal a small amount from a very poor man might also be a mortal sin, though if stolen from a rich man it would be a venial sin, because the harm done to him would not be great. So far the quotation is not very much astray, but the last part of it is quite unintelligible, and neither I nor any other Catholic priest will take the responsibility of it.

Another passage which exercises the Archdeacon's soul is this, "When thefts are committed by children or by wives, a much greater quantity is required to make the sin mortal; and rarely are these held under strong obligation to restore." This I hold to be true and reasonable, because husbands and fathers are not supposed to be so incensed at appropriations by their wives and children as to expect them to restore what they have thus appropriated. Of course it would be better that children and wives should so restore and they are always exhorted thereto, but what Liguori means is that the obligation in these cases is not generally so stringent.

The Archdeacon's little joke about the Neapolitan rug hardly needs refutation. There are more places than Naples in which a cabman cannot keep a rug in his carriage. Petty larceny is unfortunately common all over the world.

PASCAL'S LETTERS ANSWERED.

Archdeacon Fortin makes much of Pascal's Provincial Letters against the Jesuits. He says it is "a book which has never been answered, which is in fact unanswerable." Unfortunately for the Archdeacon's knowledge of literature Joseph de Maistre, a writer on the same plane as Pascal, proved that his Provincial Letters were a tissue of garbled quotations, so that he called the whole work "Les Immortelles Mentoues" (the immortal liars), and Pascal himself regretfully admitted that he had trusted to a deceitful friend who manufactured most of his quotations. The only example given by the Archdeacon is manifestly false. The Jesuit Lessius never taught that a man could kill another for the theft of an apple. The fact is Pascal was in favor of the Jansenist heresy, and therefore very much afraid of the Jesuits, who successfully combated that heresy.

THE POSITIVE SIDE.

The rest of the Archdeacon's sermon may be dismissed as irrelevant declamation. But now that I have done standing on the defensive, let me say a few words on the positive side of the Catholic doctrine. We think it unnecessary to go on recommending the Scripture and yet not learn its most obvious lessons. For instance, the Archdeacon gave as his text, "Confess your faults one to another." (James 5:16) Now this is evidently a command not a mere recommendation. If you read the context you will see that these words come immediately after the passage in which sick people are told to call in the priests of the Church to anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. It comes as a corollary of this command, "Confess your faults one to another that ye may be healed." But there is another passage of much greater cogency which I have taken for my text. In St. John's Gospel 20: 21 we read: "Then said Jesus unto them again: peace be with you; as my father has sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this he breathed on them and said unto them: Receive ye the Holy Ghost." Note the solemnity of this preamble. The Father had sent Christ to do away with all sin, and now He sends them on the same mission. He gives them the Holy Ghost, the spirit of sanctification, of justification. And now come these tremendous words, the force of which the Catholic Church alone realizes: "Whosoever sins ye remit they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain they are retained." The very form of this proposition makes it exclusive, only two things can happen to a sin, that it be remitted or retained, i. e., not remitted. The dilemma is perfect and inevitable. It amounts to saying: "Those only shall have their sins remitted who receive that remission through you." The other part need not be expressed, because all those who do not approach the persons to whom this power is given necessarily have their sins retained, i. e., not forgiven. It is as if Christ had said what He really did say to Peter, "I give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven; if you open not the door no one shall enter therein." No mention is made of the people who are to get in by the

window or some underground passage. Thus the words of Christ confer a power which is exclusive in the ordinary course of providence. To be sure, the uncoerced mercies are open to all sinners who are unconscious of this, His providence is that sins should be submitted for remission or retention to those whose power Christ thus describes. But who are these persons? The apostles to whom He spoke, but not they only. The same power must be co-extensive with the object for which it is given. The object is the remission of sin. There will always be sin. Therefore the power must remain until the end of time. But where is that ministry? Not among our separated brethren, for we have just seen that the Anglicans who claim this power, reject it in their practice, and do not make it obligatory as Christ does. Evidently this ministry is nowhere in its perpetuity, in its universal practice, except in the Roman Catholic Church.

WHY A DETAILED CONFESSION IS NECESSARY.

The priests who exercise this power must know the sins that are to be forgiven or retained. This supposes that the penitent makes a detailed confession. A confession in general terms will not suffice. We are all sinners, but what the priest must know is, if the penitent is sorry for his sins, determined to forsake them, and to avoid the occasions of relapse. Now this he can only know if the sins are mentioned in number and kind. For instance, if a man accuses himself of drunkenness, it makes an immense difference whether he has got drunk once in a year or once in a day. In the former case there is no confirmed habit; reform may be comparatively easy. In the latter case all the resources of prayer and self-denial will be needed to effect a reform. If the penitent is evidently still under the influence of drink, no priest would think of absolving him. He would retain his sin; i. e., he would tell him to come back when he was sober.

Nevertheless, just here it may be well to explain a fact which our separated brethren do not seem to understand. Although the penitent must state the kinds of sin and the number of times he has committed them, he need never mention any circumstance that would make himself or any other person known to the confessor. Especially must he avoid all useless or dangerous details. In point of fact, when it can be done many Catholics prefer to remain unknown to their confessor, and he has no right to inquire their names, nor can he in any way, by word or gesture, by act or omission, let the penitent see outside of the confessional that he remembers anything he has heard.

As to the moralizing influence of the confessional we have the testimony of Mr. W. T. Stead, who says that the superior purity of Catholics in the slums of Edinburgh and Glasgow is due to the practice of regular confession. A Protestant gentleman once said to me: "I knew in one of the large cities of the United States a set of students who made a practice of laying siege to the virtue of women, and one of those who was the most skilled in this diabolical art, said there was no hope of succeeding with Catholic women because they went to confession." Only the other day Bishop Grimes, of New Zealand, passed through Winnipeg, and related to me an anecdote quite in point. When he was parish priest in Ireland, the Protestant parson said: "Father, have my two servant girls been to confession?" "You had better ask them themselves," said Father Grimes. "O, I know," replied the parson, "that you priests don't like to talk about these matters; but I must tell you that when my servants go regularly to confession I feel quite safe about my silver plate."

In conclusion, not only is auricular confession a good thing, but it is the object of a special command in the New Testament. It purifies the soul and conduces to the morality of nations. It realizes as no other practice ever did the salutary effects of that old dictum of the Greek sage, "Know thyself." The man that habitually sifts his conscience and humbles himself before his fellow man, will find his accounts in perfect order when he is called to the judgment seat of Christ.

MADAME PATTI'S APPROACHING MARRIAGE.

The following letter has been issued by the Right Rev. Dr. Mostyn, Bishop of Minevia, in which diocese Madame Patti resides:

"My attention has been called to a statement made in several of the London papers to the effect that at the approaching wedding of Madame Patti Nicolini to Baron Caderstrom there will be a Protestant as well as a Catholic marriage ceremony. As Bishop of the Catholic diocese in which Madame Patti Nicolini resides, may I ask you to contradict this statement? Such double ceremonial, being contrary to the discipline of the Catholic Church, could not be allowed, and I am authorized by Madame Patti Nicolini to state that, as a matter of fact, at her wedding there will be none other than a Catholic marriage ceremony."

WAX CANDLES.

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Thomas Coffey,
Catholic Record Office.

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AN OLD SUBSCRIBER, St. Andrews, N. B.—Could you send us a copy of the poem? If so we will gladly print it. At present we cannot call to mind where it could be found.