

# THE POWER OF THE CONFESSIONAL.

(BY OUR SPECIAL REPORTER.)

At High Mass on Sunday last the Rev. Father Dinahan, O.P., one of the missionaries now preaching the retreat to the young women and young men of St. Patrick's Church delivered the following eloquent discourse on "The Confessional" before a large congregation:

The Rev. preacher took for his text, St. Matthew, chap. ix--the story of the healing, by Jesus, of the man stricken with the palsy. He said:

"During the past week, my dear friends, we have been preaching about the doctrine, or at least the baptism, of penance, for the remission of sins; and we have to say further, that the preaching has brought forth fruit. During the present week we will follow the same course of conduct, under Holy Mother Church's inspiration. We shall preach again to you the baptism of penance for the remission of sins, for the whole object of the retreat is to do penance in order to make peace with Almighty God. But it might be well for us to study up the matter in order that when necessity comes, we may give a reason for the faith that is in us.

"But before entering upon my subject, my friends, I wish to premise a few facts. In civil society every organized community yields submission, I might say, to a ruler or superior empowered to make laws and receive submission. That ruler is always vested with the essential elements of a ruler, viz., power and independence--power to enforce the observance and maintain the existence of his laws, and independence qualifying him to freely exercise them. You know that in civil society every ruler, in order to enforce the observance and maintain the existence of his laws, imposes a penalty upon every individual who becomes either a delinquent, by ignoring the law, or an open culprit, by its violation. This mode of action, you will admit, is an obvious necessity. It is consistent, too, with common sense and reason.

"A similar system exists between God and His creatures. We compare the universal community known as Christian society, established and presided over to-day by God Himself, God is our ruler, and in Him are created the essential attributes of a ruler, viz., power and independence--power to enforce His laws and to maintain their existence, and independence to exercise them. But you know well that God, in order to enforce the observance and uphold the existence of His laws, must necessarily impose a penalty upon every individual who becomes a delinquent, either by ignoring the law, or a culprit by violating it. This mode of action, you will acknowledge, is as necessary for the preservation of the universal community known as Christian Society, as for the preservation of any particular civil community.

"Now, further, this Christian Society of which I speak is a visible institution; we are its members and we are visible. Hence it is a visible institution; hence God, in His wisdom, must have established here on earth, in the midst of this society, some tribunal, some instrument, some agent through which He would vindicate His law and by which He would impose a penalty or a punishment upon any individual who would ignore His law, or any individual who would directly violate it. This is evident to the simplest mind. Now we will ask ourselves, 'Where on earth is this institution, tribunal, or whatever you can call it, that God has erected here on earth in order to be the vindicator of His law, and to vindicate it by imposing a punishment upon those who violate it?' We Catholics maintain that this instrument, or agent, or tribunal is the tribunal of heaven--the confessional established by God, and presided over by the priests of the Church, to whom He has delegated His virtue and His power.

"These outside the Church, whilst maintaining, or admitting rather, that God does visibly punish those who violate His law, yet maintain that God reaches His end fully by Nature itself punishing Nature's violator and by the civil community punishing the civil criminal.

"Before establishing our own position let us examine the grounds upon which this assumption of our brethren outside the Church rests. If Nature and the civil community carry out in full the ends of God, why our claim for the confessional must fall. In the first place, though, we will say that every work created by God bears the impress of His hand, and that is evidence of perfection. Every work established by God, or created by God, is perfect in its own law. Thus it will carry out perfectly the end for which it was instituted.

"If God, therefore, has established an instrument or a tribunal already to punish us for the violation of His law, the action and work of it must be perfect. God is perfect; He made it, it must be perfect in its action and work. But here, on the very threshold of our investigation, we must find out what is a perfect system of punishment. We know that a punishment, although just, must never be inflicted with vengeance. When it assumes

this form, it must necessarily engender your revenge. Punish harshly, and you drive a person either to despair or open rebellion. Justice must be exercised in order to punish the criminal and prevent the recurrence of crime; but something must always be introduced to prevent the tendency to despair and rebellion. And what is that something? It is mercy. It is the mingling of mercy with justice; it is to temper justice with mercy; it is to impose a penalty that is just, but in a merciful form. Justice exercised alone will crush the victim; mercy, on the other hand, exercised alone will impose no penalty and will compromise justice always, separate these two--justice and mercy--and you have a system of punishment that is dangerous; but mingle mercy with justice, and you have a system of punishing that heals at the very moment it wounds, that consoles at the very moment it inflicts.

"Thus you see, the real elements of a perfect penalty are justice and mercy. A perfect punishment is one that is given justly, but tempered by mercy. You will admit this is in accordance with the mind of God. God does not rule us by His justice alone, nor by His mercy alone, but by a singular commingling of His justice and mercy. Therefore you will see a perfect punishment is one that is given with justice and mercy; one that is justly given, but administered by mercy.

"Now let us proceed with our investigation. Does Nature, in punishing Nature's violator, impose a perfect punishment? I say, 'No, my friends. It may impose a just punishment, but not a merciful one.' How does Nature proceed in this work of punishing? It seizes the individual, inflicts an external as well as an internal punishment; it maims and disfigures the body, reduces it in strength, and forces the victim to a premature end. Am I not correct? When you go forth at your leisure and pass by any of the low resorts and see the victims that issue forth, behold, their sunken eyes, devoid of natural brilliancy, behold their attenuated, shivering frames, look at them as they stumble along your streets, thinking not, perhaps, what they are, but what they were and what they should have been. Ah! seldom when Nature strikes does the victim rise; it strikes at the very essence of the physical structure and curtails its very vitals. Where is the mercy of that punishment? There is none, absolutely none.

"In this case the creature is crushed, physically destroyed; and where a creature is physically destroyed by a punishment, that punishment does not mete out justice with mercy. So you see Nature hardly has a claim to an institution established by an all-wise, a just, a merciful God to punish us for the direct violation of His laws.

"Has a civil government any better claim? I say, 'No.' It may punish justly, but it really punishes in a manner that is stripped of mercy. How does it proceed in its work of punishment? It seizes the creature--one who has been guilty either of crime or a crime--drags him into your public courts, his crimes (if he had any) are laid open to public gaze and public censure. And what is consequent upon this: social disgrace, which is the equivalent of social destruction. What? Drag a man who has held a high position in your city, and a still higher one in public estimation for probity and moral worth, drag him from the bosom of his family and his friends, arraign him in your public courts, publish his crimes to the world, crush him socially, and tell me it is a merciful law? What? Dishonor, disgrace me, crush me socially, and tell me that is a merciful law? Not at all. It may be just, but I say when a victim is dishonored, is utterly disgraced, is socially murdered, that creature has not been punished with a perfect punishment. There is no mercy visible in it at all.

"Now, I am no condemning our system of government at all or modes of punishing for crime; I only wish to show you the contrast between man's working and God's working. Our civil institutions are the inventions of man, and man is limited in his capacity; he is finite, and hence his works are imperfect and finite. The method of working may be just in its way, but there is no mercy in it. To have a perfect punishment one must have one in accordance with God's mind, one that is just, but tempered by mercy.

"You see, therefore, that neither Nature as a penal instrument, nor the civil government can lay claim to the agents employed by Almighty God to directly punish us for the violation of His laws. One crushes and physically destroys; the other dishonors, disgraces socially destroys. And where a victim is destroyed, crushed by a punishment, there is no mercy.

"Where, you ask, are we to find it? It is in the Catholic Church; it is no less than that confessional consecrated and by the old Mother Church. Does not that institution, that tribunal impose a perfect penalty? Does it not punish without destroying physically? Does it not reprimand and correct without dishonoring, disgracing,

socially destroying? Does it not, I ask, heal the very moment it wounds? Does it not console the very moment it inflicts? If this be true, it is a perfect penal institution and imposes a perfect penalty--one that is tempered and acts with justice tempered with mercy. You will ask me, 'How is this?' I will answer, 'How does the confessional proceed in its mode of punishing and vindicating law?' That tribunal demands of you that you come before it and acknowledge your weaknesses and confess your crimes against Almighty God. This is just, you will admit, for when we voluntarily outrage God by trampling upon His law, it is certainly just we should voluntarily go and acknowledge our crimes and confess our faults.

"But this, viewed spiritually, is the most excessive of all humiliations. When you, for instance, have trampled upon your neighbor's field, ruined your neighbor's character or robbed him of his property, is there anything more galling to your proud nature than to be forced to kneel before him and acknowledge your fault and ask his pardon. But this, and something more than this, is the punishment of the confessional. There you kneel down before God, and acknowledge your weaknesses, your depravity, your loneliness, your perversity; you unearth secrets that are hidden in the dark recesses of your soul, which you would not breathe to the most intimate friend. Is there any punishment or humiliation equal to that? It is just, you will say, because you have voluntarily outraged God by departing from Him, and it is just that you acknowledge it and confess your crime, though it humble you to the earth.

"You will say, 'This is just; but where is the mercy?' I will show you. You confess in secret, and in your action of confessing you are shielded from the public gaze and sacred against the public censure. No one knows what transpires within that tribunal but God and yourself. You confess in secret a secret that has never been broken; you confess in secret to a man, one like yourself, but a man vested with the power and virtue of God. You unearth all your weaknesses before him, but you are not physically crushed; you are corrected, you are made a good man there; but you are not dishonored, neither are you disgraced, and you come forth from that tribunal more a man than when you went to it. You came from that tribunal as the God-man came forth from the tomb, more glorious in your manhood, more glorious in your newly risen Maker. Here is mercy. The confessional punishes you, but it does not crush you. In the confessional you are corrected, reprimanded; but not disgraced or dishonored. Here is a perfect penal instrument, here is an instrument that imposes a perfect punishment, one that tempers justice with mercy.

"My friends, we live in an enlightened age, an age in which human wisdom appears to have run to its extreme. Our legislators have actually reached perfection in their work of governing; at least, they have reached a perfection never dreamed of, much less realized, centuries ago. But I ask you now, with the enlightenment and progress of our modern day, with all the wisdom that our legislators possess and seek to manifest, 'What have they done to secure the perpetuation of this society in which we live?' I say, 'Scarcely anything.' What have they done to eradicate crime, to really reform the criminal, who is the enemy of all society? Mind, law, crime, and order, which is the basis of society, are essentially antagonistic; they are ever warring. If order is to be preserved, crime has not only to be repressed but eradicated, stamped out.

"And what have our legislators done to stamp out crime? They have picked up, to say the most, one out of every ten that have violated law and order, and flung him within the walls of your prison, and in this he is disgraced. They fling him within the walls of your penitentiaries and reformatories in order to bring back to him a sense of honor, and in this he is dishonored. What more have they done for this criminal? Nothing more. Is crime within him, then, rooted out or nature changed? Is he reformed in any manner? Not at all. He receives an external punishment, but the root of the crime is not reached at all. What constitutes the crime; is it the cold exterior? Not at all; it is a power in the interior. The external action is but an instrument under the influence and forces of the will power. The crime is in the will of a man; for every crime must be first willed, if I can use the expression by the will. And what does human wisdom do, or what has it done, to reach that will and reform it, strengthen it and give it force to control the evil passions that drive the criminal to despair? Nothing more than building a prison or penitentiary and leaving a man there dragging out his weary months or years, planning out and scheming how he will act when the prison doors are open and the walls of the penitentiary are passed.

"There is no reformation there or security for the perpetuation of our society. Crime is restrained for the moment, held down for a moment, but not eradicated. If we had to trust to human wisdom, we should have but slight guarantee for the perpetuation of our society. But, thanks to Almighty God, He in His wisdom has established on earth an institution, that, amongst all penal institutions, can eradicate crime, and reform the

criminal so that he is transformed from a sinner into a Christian and a saint. And that is the confessional.

"What is the approximate ruler of all man's actions? It is the conscience that rules all our powers, our will, our heart, our body. Every action that is performed by us has to find its origin back in our conscience, which is the director of man in all his works and actions. If a man commits a crime, you have to go back to the conscience for its origin; and if you want to eradicate it, go back to the fountain source--the conscience--and pluck it forth. And how are you ever to reach the conscience of a man? The conscience of a man can only be reached as it reveals itself; and you know there is no place on God's earth where a man reveals his conscience, but in the confessional--the tribunal of heaven. There the power of religion, which is greater than the force of arms or of penal law, acts directly on man's conscience, reforms it, strengthens it, restores it again to its normal condition, where it can control his actions, make him restrain those vain passions that rage within him, that convert the man into the criminal, that convert the sinner into the sinner.

"Ah, my friends, here is the work of God! The very workings of the confessional manifest that it is not the work of man at all. Man, with all his wisdom, could neither conceive, much less realize, such a system; and if he could, why have not these last 2,000 years developed his efforts? No, my friends, the confessional in its workings, in its nature, shows it is a work of God, not of man, but of some power above man; that it is God's work. Hence it was with the great Voltaire, one of the boldest and vilest enemies that assailed the Church in modern times. Speaking of the confessional he said: 'The Catholic Church has consecrated that in the confessional which the wisdom of man has perceived the beauty of and embraced the shadow? All that man has done on earth is to grasp at the mere shadow of this divine institution, which alone inflicts a perfect penalty, which alone reaches the root of crime and alone can save society.'

"But now you may say, 'This is all reason.' I have only attempted to establish for you this truth founded even on reason. I have shown you its action; it proves its divinity. You will ask, 'Is it true the priests of the Catholic Church have the power of forgiving sins?' I answer you, 'Yes.' Some 1,300 years ago, my dear friends, a little barque was seen flying over the rude, expansive water of the sea of Galilee. The occupants of the boat were remarkable. Their raiment bore the characteristics of noblemen, though they were in humble gown, and as their manly forms passed to and fro, there might have been seen upon their countenances and brows that smile which bespoke a hallowed within. But one of the occupants of the boat was more remarkable than the others. He stood in silent thought, with his eyes fixed on the receding shore. Around him seemed to play a divine halo, and his brow was radiant with beauty and light. The boat reached the land, and the people, in their earnest zeal, crowded round him, all eyes fixed upon him who seemed bore a strange but heavenly impress; for it was Jesus, who bore our infirmities and our diseases. The blind and lame were there, the diseased were presented to Him. And behold they brought to Him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed, and Jesus seeing their faith, said to the man sick of the palsy: 'Son, be of good heart, thy sins are forgiven thee.' But murmurs passed through the ranks of the scribes and the Pharisees: 'This man blasphemeth.' But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said: 'Why think you evil in your hearts? Which is easier to say, 'Thy sins are forgiven thee,' or to say 'Arise and walk?' And now that you may know that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins, I say to this man: 'Arise and walk.' The man rose, took up his bed and walked to his house.' And what was the result? 'The people,' we are told, 'went off praising and glorifying God because He had given such power to men.'

"This is the miracle I have just read to you from the 9th chapter of the Gospel of St. Matthew. And you will notice Christ performed this wondrous miracle for no other purpose than to convince the world that He, as man, as the Son of Man, had power on earth to forgive sins. When he saw the faith of the people, He said to the man sick of the palsy, 'Son, be of good heart, thy sins are forgiven thee.' But murmurs passed through the ranks of the Scribes and Pharisees: 'This man blasphemeth.' But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said: 'Why think you evil in your hearts? Which is easier to say, 'Thy sins are forgiven thee,' or to say, 'Arise and walk?' He put this question in this manner before them because He knew they were a carnally minded people, ruled and convinced more by their senses than anything else. He knew they would conclude that if he had power to raise this man, He would have what was in their estimation the lesser power of forgiving sins. So He said, 'Take up thy bed and go into thy house; and the man did so. And what was the result? Why, we are told the multitude were convinced of the truth of His words and of His power, and they went off praising and glorifying God, who had given such power to men.'

"The Son of Man confirmed the exercise of that power by his wondrous miracle. What inconsistency can there be in Him, as the Son of Man, delegating His power to another? What difference is there any more than that the Lieutenant Governor of this province should delegate to the sheriff of a county the authority to declare a person incarcerated in a prison free? None. But did not God directly, as plain as sunshine, delegate to His disciples, who were His priests on earth, the power to forgive sins? It was some days after the performance of the miracle of which I have spoken that the disciples were assembled for instruction, and Our Lord appeared before them and said: 'Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whosoever you shall bind on earth shall be bound also in Heaven, and whatsoever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed also in Heaven.' Now, my friends, by these positive, clear words God delegated to His disciples assembled around Him, who were the first priests of the Church, the very power He Himself exercised of loosening those who were bound by the chains of sin on earth.

"You know that he was speaking of moral slavery and moral bonds. When He said to them: 'Whosoever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed also in heaven,' He said: 'Whosoever sins you shall forgive on earth that moment they are forgiven in heaven.' But still, my friends, God was not satisfied. He knew that men would exhort His words and endeavor to explain them away (as they have done), and hence he was determined to be rigidly explicit in delegating His power to His priesthood. It was after the death of our Lord that the disciples fled to an upper chamber in the house in the suburbs of Jerusalem. They feared the Jews, who had put their Master to death, and they gathered in this upper private hidden room in order to save themselves, and pray to Heaven. We are told they closed the door and barred it, and closed up the windows with heavy bars, and there in silence and fear, raised their hearts and minds to heaven, and while so engaged, a rustling noise was heard amongst them, and looking up they beheld Jesus in all the grandeur and glory of the risen God. He had walked through the barred door into their midst, and He said to them: 'Amen, amen. I say to you, whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven, and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained.'

"Now, I ask, could God give expression to an idea in clearer, plainer or more positive words. He wanted to confer upon them the power of forgiving sins, and He said: 'Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them,' as in the same manner He said: 'Whosoever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed instantly in heaven.' There is nothing clearer than this doctrine. He has, plainly as God ever spoke, delegated to His disciples, the priests of His Church, the power to forgive sins. 'Whose sins,' said He, 'you shall forgive, they are forgiven, and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained.' That power as exercised to-day, has been exercised from the beginning. God gave this power to the disciples, the priests of the Church, to be exercised for the consummation of the world.

"God delegated to His apostles, the priests of the Church, two powers--one the power of preaching, the other the power of forgiving sins. The day He delegated the power of preaching, He said: 'Go into the whole world and preach the Gospel to every creature, and, behold, I will be with you all days even to the very end of the world.' You see if God is to remain with the Church to the very end of the world, that Church must be in existence; that priesthood must be in existence. If you deny that the Church ceases to exist, you prove Christ a liar, because He said: 'I will be with you, even to the very end of the world.' Now, unless this priesthood, the Church, exists to the end of the world, our God is a liar. He is not a liar. And, therefore, priests and the Church will exist, and while they do, they must necessarily exercise the powers entrusted to them. And what are these powers? The authority and power to preach truth without deceiving, and the power to forgive sins when you are chained by them. God said to the Church: 'Go and preach the Gospel to every creature. Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them. Behold, I your God, am with you all days, even to the end of the world.'

"Here, now, is the reason why we, your priests, to-day, as the descendants of the disciples, exercise the power to remit sins. But you ask, 'Where is the tribunal which you are speaking?' Since God gave to the priest the power or authority to forgive sins, He necessarily constituted Him as a judge. Now, since he is a judge, established by God to forgive sins; you know he can never forgive sins unless he knows them; and the judge, or priest, can never know them unless a man makes them public. Hence the confessional. When a man confesses his sin, he is an accuser and a witness to his own sin. This is the tribunal of which I told you that alone punished with justice tempered with mercy--the only instrument in this world that heals the very moment it wounds, consoles the very moment it inflicts. It is the only power on earth that can ever reach man's conscience, which is the ruler of man either for good or for evil. Hence it is the only power that can tear out crime and the only power that can raise man to his normal condition; so

that his higher power rules his lower. Here is this grand tribunal, and you ought to thank God for His mercy as manifested in it. This confessional, through which he gives you the right or privilege of being reconciled to Him is the highest and fullest exposition of His infinite mercy.

"Brethren, as that sacrament of the altar, where Jesus Christ, God, is night and day amongst you, is the highest, fullest, grandest exposition of God's infinite love for us, so that tribunal of penance, where the mind of man that is darkened by sin is enlightened, where the will that has been broken and robbed of force, of strength, and where the heart that has been ruled and broken by sin and crime is brought to life again, that tribunal is the highest and grandest exposition of God's infinite mercy for man. Thank God, then, for what He has done for you, and make it the rule of your life to show your appreciation of His Mercy, to seek from Him the forgiveness of your sins. Go then, to-day from His temple here, as these people mentioned in the Gospel which I read for you to-day; go as they did, praising and thanking and glorifying God because He has given such power to men."

## VICTORIA BRIDGE.

The old Victoria Bridge, one of the wonders of the world in its day, may be said to have disappeared. The 'Jubilee' bridge took its place to-day, and at 12 o'clock trains were running upon the double track of the new bridge, in the fall view.

Mr. Hays had not long been in office until he determined that the Victoria bridge must be adapted to modern needs. The dark, stuffy, ill-smelling tube was out of date. It restricted the business of the company. It was dangerous. It was antiquated. It prevented the expansion of traffic, which was one of the things which the new management had determined to realize for the old Grand Trunk--conservative, cautious, not willing, under the old regime, to take a long step in advance.

The tubular bridge was the last work of engineering science forty years ago, and the Victoria bridge was the last expression of the tubular idea. Upon its completion, at a cost of nearly seven million dollars, it was opened by the Prince of Wales. The work was lauded all over the world as the perfect triumph of the best engineering.

The single track sufficed for a limited business which did not look for a great expansion in the near future. Then came a time when, even to the old management, it seemed that something should be done in order to meet the needs of an expanding business which, with new affiliations, with the increase of population and industry, required modern facilities. The old management was rather timid; the directors were far away; every fresh expenditure upon a system from which no dividends were expected provoked a louder growl of wrath from the shareholders; and nothing was done.

Mr. Hays came to office with plenary powers. He was given a free hand. He appointed his own men. He thought out his own policy. And he determined to reconstruct the bridge. This he has done at a cost of over a million and a half of dollars, of which sum the Federal Government has contributed three hundred thousand dollars.

The bridge is not actually finished, for the footways and carriage roads are to be laid down, but the last relics of the old structure were removed yesterday evening, and to-day the trains were running upon the double track of what is practically a new structure, which, in its expanded form, is destined to facilitate a business the volume of which would not have been dreamed of by the men who, over thirty years ago, planned the great Victoria bridge, with its single track, its discomfort and its danger--the latter element being always present in spite of the most vigilant watchfulness.

In the early summer of next year when the bridge is completed, there will probably be a formal opening. The simplicity and directness with which the old was abandoned for the new expresses the democratic spirit of the new management.

## SIR WILLIAM JENNER DEAD.

London, Dec. 12.--Sir William Jenner, the distinguished pathologist and physician in ordinary to the Queen and the Prince of Wales, died to-day.

The late Sir William Jenner, who was born at Chatham in 1815, and who was president of the Royal College of Physicians from 1881 to 1889, when he retired from the practice of his profession, was well known, not only to pathologists, but to the public at large as having been the first to establish beyond dispute the difference in kind between typhus and typhoid fevers.

On the death of Dr. Baly, in 1861, Sir William Jenner was appointed to succeed him as physician extraordinary to the Queen, and the next year he was gazetted physician in ordinary to Her Majesty, receiving the same preferment in 1865 in the household of the Prince of Wales.

It was in recognition of his services rendered during a severe illness of the Prince that he was made Knight Commander of the Bath. He wrote numerous papers on fever, the acute specific diseases, diphtheria, diseases of children and diseases of the heart, lungs and skin.

## IMPORTANT NOTICE TO INTENDING PIANO PURCHASERS.

Rather than purchase some inferior piano from manufacturers of cheap instruments and do as some of our competitors are doing, recommending them as being first-class, we have decided to make special holiday reductions during the balance of December, on our own piano. Call and see what we can do for you before making your selection. Present stock is fresh from our factories. Open evenings until January 1st, 1894. The D. W. Kern Co., Ltd., Kern Hall Bldg., St. Catherine St.