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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 whosesoever 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 "straightbacks", to keep up our parable, do so with very serious limitations. They seem to say that "straightbacks" 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 consists 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 his 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

AURICULAR CONFESSION

Father Drummond Demolishes Archdeacon Fortin

NEW AND CRUSHING REPLIES TO SLANDERS AGAINST
THE CONFSSIONAL.

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 it (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. Into 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 CONFSSIONAL 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, borrowed from Canon Scannell, 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 chastly guarded Latin, whereas in the authorized version it is set forth in what to over-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, a 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 can be 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 ubiquitous slander against the confessional. They know that a certain class of Protestants will believe anything about Papists 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 willfully 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 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

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