

SELECTED.

MUSNBETH'S DEFENCE OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH.

Continued.

Setting out, as usual, with a false assertion,—that the object of the Catholic Church is “to deprive men both of their understanding and their will, and make them blind tools of her own,” Mr. White next speaks of confession. He misrepresents its nature and effects, and of course its origin. He says, erroneously and insultingly: “the Romanist Church makes the confession of every sin, by thought, word, and deed, necessary to receive absolution from a priest.” This he knew to be a wrong assertion in two respects, for 1st. We are not obliged to confess any sins which are not mortal and 2dly, We are only obliged to confess such as we can remember after a diligent examination; whereas Mr. White’s proposition would mean, that we could not be absolved unless we confessed all our sins, and would leave no hope of forgiveness for those we have forgotten. We believe that sins inculpably forgotten are forgiven as well as those confessed. Mr. White next declares that confession “has changed the repentance of the Gospel, into a ceremony which silences remorse at the slight expense of a doubtful, temporary sorrow.” Mr. White knows, on the contrary, that we only believe confession profitable, as far as it is joined to a true contrition or repentance for sin, accompanied with a firm resolution to sin no more, and to make satisfaction to God and our neighbour. As confession is difficult and humbling, a sinner will seldom be brought to it, unless he has already conceived some sentiments of repentance, and desire to be reconciled to God; and, so far from confession, “changing the repentance of the Gospel,” we uniformly find that those who are abandoned to vice, desert the tribunal of confession, while those who are moved to repentance always return to it. Many Protestants have wished for the re-establishment of confession, and have admitted the depravity of morals which followed from its abolition among them, a proof that they did not consider it as “changing the repentance of the Gospel.”

Having thus misrepresented the nature of confession, it was to be expected that Mr. White would be equally unsparing as to its effects. Accordingly, we find him affecting indignation at what he terms “the paltry plea” that confession often causes restitution of ill-gotten goods. “The truth is,” he adds, “that restitution is not a whit more probable among Roman Catholics,” than other Christians; and he splendidly confirms this by saying, that in the course of fifteen years that he has lived in England, he has known one restitution by a poor person of a sum of money, without confession! To this he might answer, that where confession is in use, theft is less likely to prevail, and restitutions are not so often to be made; but we are content with observing, that Catholics have all the motives to urge them to make restitution which others have, such as repentance, remorse, &c.; and in addition to them, they have the serious remonstrances and exhortations of every Confessor who does his duty, as also the delay or refusal of absolutions in cases of neglect or unwillingness on the part of the sinner to restore. Where then is the greater probability of restitution being duly made? In the one case the sinner has no human being to admonish him, but is left to his own conscience; in the other, besides his conscience, he has the exhortations and threats of his Church to urge him to his duty still more powerfully. An instance was published in the newspapers not very long ago, of a gentleman in London receiving a box of valuable jewellery from Italy; restored to him, through the hands of a priest, by a servant maid who had robbed him of it in England; and this was effected by

the ministry of confession. There is no Catholic Confessor who could not furnish many instances of restitutions which he has known and been instrumental in procuring; but it will readily be conceived that there are many imperious reasons which forbid the disclosure of such examples. Mr. White however, makes a curious confession himself. He says he can assure his readers as Penitent, as well as Confessor, that “confession is exceedingly injurious to purity of mind.” This is rather an awkward acknowledgment, for a man who was very anxious in his first Dialogue, to have it believed that he had been so innocent before he fell into infidelity: it leads us to suspect that he was not remarkably correct in his duty, either as Penitent or Confessor, and if so, it is no wonder if the laver of grace and regeneration should have proved to him a source of defilement: *ab immundo quid mundabitur?*

But now comes a graver charge: “a Confessor can promote even treason with safety, in the secrecy which protects his office.” How so, Mr. Blanco White? If the Confessor endeavours to excite his penitents to treason, surely they can denounce him to the civil powers; and he must be very stupid if he thinks himself secure by virtue of the secrecy of his office. He is quite as liable to punishment in such a case as any other promoter of treason, and he would be more richly deserving of it, for having impiously profaned his sacred ministry. But if it is here insinuated that a Confessor can promote treason in which the penitent confesses himself implicated, this is more improbable than the other case; for a penitent concerned in treason would not be likely to present himself at the confessional, or if he did, he would not confess his treason if he had not resolved to renounce it; for Mr. White knows perfectly well that no man implicated in treason could be absolved by a conscientious priest, but would be earnestly exhorted by every means to renounce such iniquity, and to give information to the proper authorities. For the rest, there is nothing so holy that men will not abuse; and whatever abuses Mr. White’s confessional practice may have brought to his knowledge, they cannot justly be urged against the real good of the institution, nor weigh a feather against its manifest and acknowledged utility.

Now to attend to Mr. White’s account of its origin: he puts this speech for the reader in his Dialogue. “I cannot help wondering how the Church of Rome could persuade men to submit to such a revolting and dangerous practice as that of confession.” It would certainly be matter for wonder if the Church of Rome could have persuaded men to submit to confession. That mankind have in every age submitted to it, is a solid proof that it is no invention of Rome. Confession is too painful and humiliating for any human authority to have been able to establish it in every age and nation, as we know it to have been established; and we thank Mr. Blanco White for thus unintentionally reminding us of one very powerful proof of its being of Divine institution. It is a strong argument of the truth of Christianity, that, opposed as it is to human passions, it was firmly established on the wreck of Paganism; and it is a powerful proof of the Divine institution of confession, that it has been in every age observed by the great majority of the Christian world. It will be well, however, to remind Mr. White again, that if, as he would have it, confession was imposed upon the world by the Church of Rome, he must tell us how it comes that the Greeks, the Jacobites, the Nestorians and Armenians, have ever retained the practice of sacramental confession the same as Catholics. These sects separated from the communion of Rome 1200 years ago; and therefore confession must have been the usage of the universal Church at that time; and then what becomes of Mr. White’s

attempt to shew that Rome invented it in the ignorance of the dark ages!

But confession did not grow up gradually with what Mr. W. opprobriously terms the “Roman system.” In the second century, Origen speaks of confession made to the priest. In the third, St. Cyprian speaks of secret sins confessed to the priests, and of remission granted by them. St. Irenaeus, Tertullian, and others testify to the practice of secret confession to the ministers of the Church. And though Mr. White pretends that there is nothing in Scripture to support the practice, we can shew him that it is solidly grounded upon Scripture.

To be Continued.

ORIGINAL.

VANITY OF VANITIES! AND ALL IS VANITY.
Ecclesiastic. Chap. I, Verse 2.

Human life is, but a dream,
Passing like a sunny beam,
When the cloud across the sky
Flitting darkens Phœbus’ eye

See you curling vapour’s train
Proudly sweeping o’er the plain!
The breeze is up, it fades away,
So shall the pride of life decay.

Pleasures, honours, wealth and pow’r
Seem to last but scarce an hour:
Death approaches; lo, they take
Their sudden flight, and us for ake.

The Butterfly on spangled wings
Hovers round in airy rings:
Worldlings, like the thoughtless boy,
Fast pursue the fleeting toy.

On to ruin’s brink they press,
Panting eager in the chase:
While, around them sends deride,
Angels blushing turn aside.

Mortals! stop your mad career!
Lo the precipice how near!
Turn ye! further if you strive,
Down the dreadful steep you’ll drive.

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