

THE CONFSSIONAL.

We have lately met with an interesting pamphlet from the English press, on Clerical celibacy and the Confessional, being a letter addressed to a Protestant gentleman by the Rev. P. McLachlan. The following extract from it, on the Confessional, is particularly commended to the careful perusal of our Protestant readers.

"We Catholics believe, (and observe, if you please, that I am merely propounding not proving our doctrines)—we Catholics believe that Christ left to the pastors of his Church the power of forgiving and retaining sin: we believe this power to be of a judicial nature, that is, that those who possess it act the part of a judge, and exert this power, or exert it not, as in their conscience they deem it expedient for the glory of God and the good of souls. They can forgive sins—but only the sins of those who are truly penitent, and otherwise truly disposed: they can forgive sins—but not at random nor capriciously—for they must know what those sins are for which forgiveness is implored. Now, the sins of the penitent, and the inward dispositions of his soul, they can learn only from the penitent himself. Hence on him devolves the duty of declaring his guilt, of expressing his sorrow—of vowing fidelity to Almighty God for the time to come. And this is confession! What is there, I pray you, so mischievous in this? To confess our sins, is merely to declare that we have broken the law of God on such and such occasions. Sin, you know is a violation of God's law. Now, we say nothing in secret to our Father Confessor which the Almighty, when he gave his law did not say publicly to the whole world. We hear nothing in the confessional which we read not of in the Bible.

Your object, nevertheless, to the confessional, and you style it "dangerous" the steps that lead to it. You would abolish it altogether: or if you failed in this, you would not suffer females to approach it until they had reached the thirty-sixth year of their age. Your anxiety for the abolition of a practice, admitted by all those who know anything at all of it to be most salutary, shows that, on subjects connected with Catholic theology, you have much to learn: while your being able to point out the precise age when females are beyond temptation proves that, in some respects, you have attained a degree of knowledge of which no ancient or modern philosopher could boast.

But, Sir, I protest against the whole of your reasoning on this point: it is sadly erroneous. So far from the steps of the confessional being dangerous I maintain that they lead to virtue's path. Confession is not, I assure you Sir, that school of vice and immorality which the orators of Exeter Hall have

long represented it to the Protestant public of Britain. People go to confession, not to commit new sins, but to declare and deplore their past iniquities; people go to confession, not to talk of the news of the day, or of family affairs, or indeed of anything else but their sins and the concerns of their souls. You have heard that, at confession, all sorts of questions are put to young persons! you are told that every family secret is revealed to the Father Confessor. Now the truth is, that penitents are strictly forbidden to mention, in confession, the names of any person whatever—to speak of aught but their own spiritual concerns, and to confess other than their own sins. As to the priest asking questions, although he is of course instructed, as he ought to be, in all that pertains to his office, he is not bound to ask any question whatever: and he does ask questions only when, from the ignorance of the penitent, or some other cause of that kind, he feels himself compelled to do it; and he does it then solely to help the penitent, and to render a most difficult task more easy to him.

These, Sir, are facts; and, by consulting any of our Catholic books of instruction which speak of this subject, you will find that I have stated them fairly.

I will be told, perhaps, that there is much indelicacy in young females making certain disclosures to young unmarried men. To this my first answer is, that of the young females who frequent the "steps" of the Confessional, very few have such disclosures to make as they need be ashamed of; secondly, that, even in the worst cases, there is much less indelicacy in disclosing the wounds of the soul to the spiritual physician, than in making known the infirmities of the body to him whose profession it is to cure them. You feel no indelicacy in placing this young lady or that, when circumstances require it, under the care of a surgeon. He puts questions to her; he sees her, he feels her, he examines her; he returns again and again to study the symptoms, and at his leisure he draws his conclusions: yet the world censures him not.—Now, is the surgeon circumspect, or more discreet than the priest? Is he more conscientious? more honorable? more Godfearing? If not, why should the priest be condemned, when the surgeon is acquitted? or why should that be reckoned indelicate in the one which is not reckoned equally indelicate in the other? Is not the soul more precious than the body? or, should we not be as anxious to save the eternal life of the one as the health of the other?

But there is danger in going to confession—yes, danger, I suppose to young ladies. Let us see.*

*The cry about the danger of the confessional is comparatively of very recent date, and owes its origin, perhaps, to political rather than to religious bigotry. It was raised by the Whigs, some years ago, to drive Don Carlos from Spain, and by the Tories to expel Lord Melbourne and his friends from