

tion is certain to be split, and usually splits are irreparable. Most congregations who elect the minister contain "irreconcilables" who have been defeated and who are incessantly intriguing to bring on "a ministerial crisis" in order to put in their own nominee. True it is that these evils exist in the Church where popular election is restricted; it cannot but be so for they arise from the perverse tendencies of human nature. But in the Church these evils are like weeds in an unfavorable, unwatered soil, where they are fought against, whereas in all bodies which elect their ministers these evils are nursed into rank luxuriance by cultivation under congenial conditions.

From these scandals and divisions the Divine Head of the Church will preserve His Body, for He has declared that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

The dynamics of Heaven take no account of the weight of earthly numbers. In the day of Judgment Christ will not judge His deputy shepherds by the mere size of their flocks. He who was faithful to the Church, that is faithful to Christ, whose sheep were scattered or stolen by sectarian guile will not therefore lose his reward. When some seductive, popularity hunter claims his large following as his jewels, the Master will say to him, "Yours? nay, Mine; these sheep you drew away from My Church into the wilderness of schism, for the nurture of My Sacraments you substituted the husks of human rhetoric, but I watched over them, I fed them, I kept them in safety until this day for Him to whom in the order of My Church they were committed, but whose flock you scattered. Your rank will be with the humblest, you are saved but as by fire, for the divisions you helped to perpetuate injured My Church far more than any service you or your man-made rivals ever did. On earth you had your reward in the applause of men, while My Deputy had your taunts and poverty, now he will have My honor, but you, as a pastor of My Church—I never knew you." So will vanish the glory of Denominationalism.

CONFESSION MADE THE POISON OF THE SOUL.

THE following is from a sermon by the Bishop of Meath, preached before the University of Oxford in May last:

"The 'Sacrament of Penance' has three parts so far as the acts of the penitent are concerned, contrition or attrition, confession and satisfaction. I now proceed to speak of the third. The 'satisfaction' prescribed by the Council of Trent consists in the performance of certain acts enjoined by the priest, partly to test and cultivate the penitent's sorrow for his sin, partly to satisfy the justice of God. Now, this latter motive is founded on what is doubtless true. It is true that when a man has done something amiss, the sorrow he may feel when he comes to a better mind will not do away with the consequences of his deed, so far as this life is concerned. If he has stolen and is detected he will be put in

prison, and his character will be blasted, no matter how penitent he is, unless, indeed, he has stolen on a gigantic scale. If he has wasted his substance and his health in riotous living, he will not be the less a beggar or an invalid because he regrets his vicious courses. So far as this life is concerned, God punishes even while he pardons. According to the Psalmist's profoundly true expression, He is a 'God that forgives the sinner, and yet takes vengeance on his inventions.' There is, therefore, a certain amount of truth that underlies the Roman doctrine of satisfaction. It is in their application of the truth that the error and the mischief dwell. For they apply it, not to the actual punishment in this life of sins and crimes, which is essential to the maintenance of society, but to their supposed punishment in the life to come. The penances or satisfactions they impose upon their penitents are not to satisfy God's justice, in so far as that justice has been outraged by crimes against society, but are intended to appease God's wrath in the direct relations between the soul and God, in which regard God's justice has been already satisfied by Christ's atonement. And the result of this false view is doubly mischievous. On the one hand, it makes men think less of Christ's satisfaction for our sins; on the other hand, it destroys or impairs that sense of justice by which true penitence must always be accompanied, and which is the main safeguard of society. I will illustrate by an example what I mean.

We will suppose a man to have committed one of those agrarian murders which have gained Ireland an unenviable notoriety. He goes to confession, and of course confesses the murder amongst his other sins, if indeed, he regards it as a sin at all. For in the catechisms and books issued by authority for the instruction of the populace, murder is defined to be 'the killing of a man unjustly.' If, therefore, the criminal persuades him that in killing his victim he did not act 'unjustly,' he has literally no sin whatever to confess. According to the teaching of his Church, he need not even mention the deed in the Confessional. Nay, if he has only killed a wrong person by mistake, he has not committed murder according to the modern reigning casuistry, since murder required intention, and the intention to kill the person actually killed was wanting. However, I shall suppose he is not quite so hardened as the authorised teaching of his Church would make him. I shall suppose that he does think he has committed a sin in some degree by killing a man, even though he slew him by mistake, or at any rate, according to the agrarian code, did not put him to death unjustly. He confesses this sin, then, and the priest gives him absolution on the condition of his performing some act of penance by way of satisfaction. Now the real case with regard to sins against God, which at the same time are crimes against man, is this: That no person who has sinned against God can be pardoned unless he makes all the reparation in his power to man. This is a vital

truth, and it is a truth too frequently forgotten. People must not fancy they can really repent of their sin against God, and yet contrive to enjoy its advantages, or to escape the penalties affixed to it by man. To use a homely proverb, they cannot 'Eat their cake and have it.' They cannot be really sorry for the sin, and yet retain its profits or evade its punishment. In the case I have supposed—the case of a murderer—there can be no true penitence, and therefore, there can be no forgiveness, unless the criminal makes all the reparation to society he can, and this can only be done by confessing his crime and giving himself up to justice. This is the only reparation he can make, and this reparation he is bound to make. Now, does the Roman Priest ever tell his penitent this? Do you think that, if he did, the detection and punishment of a murder, instead of being the rule, would be the rare exception in Ireland, a country in which for more than fifty years no Protestant has ever been even suspected of an agrarian murder? Do you think that if he had, assassination would flourish as it does there, and that the sympathy of the most religious peasantry in Europe would be always given to the assassin, never to the victim? No, the 'satisfaction' imposed by the priest according to the rules of that church which exercises a power so vast, an influence so persuasive, is not that satisfaction which alone could stamp penitence as real and lend it efficacy; it is not the reparation to society for the crime committed against society, and to punish which the magistrate in Ireland has long borne the sword almost in vain; it is some fantastic observance which is supposed to mitigate the pains of purgatory; perhaps the repetition by the score or the hundred of the Lord's Prayer and the Ave Maria, thus turning prayer into a punishment, perhaps abstinence from meat and eggs, or walking barefoot to chapel, or crawling on bare knees round some consecrated well so many times, or giving money to religious uses. But not in a single instance is it the only 'satisfaction' that would avail, the only 'satisfaction' which in such a case is aught but mockery! And thus Confession, instead of being the medicine, becomes the poison of the soul, because it makes men easy under the most tremendous crimes.

"But, besides the great mischiefs which inhere in the modern Romish doctrine and practice with regard to the 'Sacrament of Penance,' there are others, and hardly inferior ones, which flow from the practice of compulsory or habitual confession in itself. As every confession made to man must turn upon the single acts, and cannot well deal with the sinful principles of motives, its tendency is to disguise from the sinner that wherein his sinfulness really consists: to make him regard it as a mere set of external acts instead of a deep inward habit or disease; and accordingly we find that habitual confession is recommended on the score of its purifying properties. The penitent is quite clean and pure after confessing and being absolved; his soul, to use an expression in their books, is made bright and beautiful like an angel of God, as soon as the