

**A FEW WORDS ON THE CONFSSIONAL.**

That dreadful name! Who has not heard of it? What Protestant has not had the lesson duly inculcated on his mind from his earliest youth, that of all the practical abominations of Popery, the confessional is one of the worst? Many, perhaps, of those who read these pages, have grown up with the fixed idea that the confessional was an invention of the crafty monks of the middle ages, continued by their no less crafty successors in modern times. "It was their receipt of custom, where they sat minting money out of the sins of their penitents. The wealthy transgressor, who could afford to come down handsomely, was let off on easy terms; he was the great hornet or drone, breaking through the spider's web. But woe to the weaker flies that get entangled there! No mercy for them. The lean and hungry priest-spider, lurking there in his obscure corner, fixes his fangs upon them, and drains them, not indeed of their heart's blood, but of the scanty pittance that was to keep body and soul together! The portion of the window, the inheritance of the fatherless, the hard-won wages of the labourer and artisan, all find their way, under plea of absolution, into that insatiable grasp. Oh, the confessional was a choice invention of the priesthood! No wonder they strain every nerve to uphold it."

Then, too, there are other darker and more iniquitous charges, lending their aid to build up that towering Protestant tradition which denounces the confessional, without really knowing aught about the matter. All writers and declaimers, from the Reformation downwards,—heads of families, quiet country gentlemen, pulpit-orators, and what not, have said the same thing for some three hundred years; they say it to-day, and will say it again to-morrow. And thus, armed with this great tradition as with a wide-mouthed blunderbuss, the Protestant fires boldly into the dark, hit or miss; and having first settled in his mind what the confessional has been, must be, and shall be, concludes by force of an unanswerable logic what it is.

We also have our notions of what it is. And one thing we would venture to remark; that they who have never entered a confessional are not quite so likely to be acquainted with it as those who have. The Hindoo subjects of the East India Company believe the Company itself to be a mighty Begum, or princess, sitting enthroned in Leadenhall Street. Half the globe lies between them, and they have no adequate means of correcting their judgment. Protestants live side by side with their Catholic neighbors, and meet them daily in the common intercourse of life; and yet, strange to say, they surround themselves with an atmosphere of prejudice as thick and blinding, though as unsubstantial as a London fog, that prevents their seeing whereabouts their neighbors stand, and deadens the sound of their voices when they would address them. Hence it is, that on our present subject, as on so many others of Catholic interest, the great body of intelligent educated Englishmen entertain notions as groundless and extravagant as those of the Hindoo regarding the princess in Leadenhall Street.

For what, in truth, does a Protestant see, and what can he ascertain, of the confessional! He wanders into some church in Italy, we will imagine, and a scene presents itself to his astonished eyes and curious mind, to the meaning of which he has but little clue. It is getting dusk, on a Friday or Saturday evening, or on the eve of a festival. The old church looks more solemn and mysterious than ever in that gloom; its arches and pillars soar away into the darkness overhead. No light but the last beams dying on the antique glass of those narrow windows, or a few lamps burning here and there at some of the altars, including one that glimmers suspended before a large crucifix, around which a few poor women are kneeling and saying their beads. Why all this gloom and mystery? Simply, my good friend, because these poor people have been hard at work all day, and are now dedicating just that portion of their time which your village gossips would employ upon tea and scandal, to examining their consciences, and preparing for their communion to-morrow morning. Besides, they are anxious to let as brief a time as possible elapse between the Sacrament which is to cleanse and the Sacrament which is to feed them; they desire to present themselves at the altar to-morrow with their souls clothed in the "fine linen, clean and white," unsoiled, if that were possible, by the slightest return to even a venial unfaithfulness to the vows they are renewing before that crucifix. Therefore they come for confession as late as they well can, and they will come for Mass and Communion as early. And you, dear Protestant, must be up betimes if you would see them communicate; or we shall put you down as one of those superficial tourists who lounge into our churches when morning wanes into mid-day,—long after the early Masses (each with its little band of faithful communicants) have been said, and then go home and solemnly assure your neighbors, and write a book to prove, that the people in Catholic countries never receive the Holy Communion.

But let us walk up the church; for we have not yet seen the confessional itself. There stands the dreaded object,—a wooden structure, some eight feet high, divided into three compartments. In the centre one sits the priest: you can still distinguish him in the twilight, with cassock and surplice, beretta and purple stole. He is putting his ear to a grating, or rather plate of metal pierced with small holes, in the partition-board that divides the centre of the confessional from the side-places where the penitents kneel. A similar grating, now closed up by a small wooden door, is at the other side of his sentry-box. When he has

finished with the confession of the penitent on one side, he will close the small door covering the grating of that side, and open the other. For on either side kneels a penitent; the one actually confessing, the other waiting and preparing. Now, then, is the time of conjecture! What have these people to say to the priest, and what says the priest to them? That middle-aged hard featured woman on the one side, is she come just to shuffle off a week's-worth or a month's worth of petty cheatings and abusive language, with whatever else may make up her story, and then go away to run up a fresh score? And for that young and innocent-looking creature whose turn is to come next, can I be sure that, in all the cross-questionings which I find put down in the manuals for confessors, she may not be learning more evil than she is come to tell? That elderly man kneeling a few paces off sipping his sugar and loading his scales, if he frequents his confessional! Ah, here comes a swarthy peasant from the country, with beard enough to furnish forth a captain of banditti. A medal and a scapular are round his neck. Does he wear them as a charm against the carbines of the mounted police? And is he come to confess half-a-dozen murders, and going straightway back to commit half-a-dozen more?

So questions the Protestant, perplexed and anxious, as he sees penitent after penitent rise up from the right hand or the left of the confessional, leave their places for others to occupy, and walk with noiseless step to kneel before some of the altars of the church, and say the prayers that have been assigned them for penance, and make their act of thanksgiving. He cannot but acknowledge to himself the solemnity of the sight, and the air of reality and (what may be called) religious business that pervades it. These people are evidently thinking of nothing but their own spiritual concerns, and are in earnest about them. They take no notice of him, as he walks about, staring at the pictures or the stained windows; except, perhaps, to put up some little prayer for him, that "stranger and foreigner" as he is, he may be brought one day into the great family, and under the power of Sacramental grace. And now we will put into a few words what any one of them might have answered him, if he had taken the trouble to question them about the proceedings of the mysterious confessional.

You have then, my good friend, an impression that Catholics are subject to a system of the most prolonged, minute, painful, nay, revolting system of cross-questioning, whenever they come to seek the pardon of their sins. It is in your ideas such an ordeal as must not only exorcise, but debase and vitiate the minds that are exposed to it; and to prove the point against us, you hold up on your platforms and in your drawing rooms the works of our authorized writers on moral theology; you turn to special subjects, note down the pages, and then face us with a triumphant air, as though we could find nothing to say with such a terrific array of passages witnessing against us. A solemn sense of duty nerves you to mention in English what was written in Latin for the guidance of the priest; or, with still more damaging effect, you profess yourself incapable of sullyng your lips and wounding the ears of your audience by the recital. And then, after quoting, or hinting, you are only astonished that very shame of countenance does not drive us from our place. "Retreat," you seem to say; "retire, priests and people of a debasing creed and yet more debasing practice! Find your home, your dupes and victims, among the degenerate populations of the south. Pour these minute lessons of graduated crime into the ears of the sons and daughters of Italy and Spain: my hearth at least shall be kept pure and free."

Softly, and for once do not refuse to examine. I am not going to follow the casuists into their definitions or distinctions. You would not wish me to do so, any more than I should wish it myself. But let me tell you another thing: "none would have intended it less than those casuists themselves." They did not write for you or for me. It was their duty (and faithfully, though reluctantly, they have performed it) to instruct those on whom lay the heavy burden and responsibility of deciding "between holy and profane," and teaching God's people to discern "between clean and unclean." You seem, dear Protestant, to forget that the very idea of confession includes a statement of sins, but as to nature, number, aggravation, and relapse; and that such a statement, if not sufficiently made (whether from ignorance or inadvertence, or whatever other cause) must be elicited by questions. To suppose the Sacrament of Penance administered without occasional questions, is to suppose its more than occasional nullity; and to suppose an indiscriminate approach to the altar without previous confession, is a prospect which a little meditation on the nature of sin, and of the transcendent sanctity of the Gift received by the communicant, renders frightful to contemplate.

We say, then, either bar from the sinner all approach to the Bread of Life, or prepare him by previous confession. And if it is to be such a confession as shall indeed cleanse and heal his soul, let it be more than the vague general acknowledgement of sin provided for (for example) by the Book of Common Prayer, in which the saint, all but touching on the threshold of Paradise, might take his part with the wretch whose dark crimes have prepared him for the abyss of hell. Let it be a confession full, distinct, particular; not the assertion that a fallen nature needs remedy, but an exposure of the individual ulcer and sores. Let it be a confession, not of humanity in the abstract, but of A, B, or C, D, with such and such a character and predisposition, such and such antecedents and present remainders of sin,—placed in this circumstance of disadvantage or that trying occasion or acting under a pro-

tical doubt, or unable to strike the balance between opposing claims or comparative evils. Let it be the confession of one who feels that he has before him a duty touching his own soul, as distinct from the souls of his fellow-men,—a duty, not graceful, as a general acknowledgment of imperfections might be, but plain and humiliating, as in the detail of one's own unvarnished weaknesses and grievous fails. Let this be made in a spirit of faith, that believes in the all-sufficiency of the atonement on the cross to wash away the blackest sins of a thousand worlds, and the unerring certainty with which the merits of the Redeemer's Blood are applied to every rightly disposed soul in the Sacrament of Penance. Let the sinner come in hope that by the Divine faithfulness, pledged to him on his true repentance and use of the means ordained, he may appropriate to himself all the promises of pardon, and grace to help in future trials. Let him come in love, however poor and inadequate; love that is teaching him to detest his sins as so many offences against an infinite goodness, and therefore rousing him to effectual contrition for them, and a hearty resolution, by the help of Divine grace, to avoid all the occasions that have hitherto betrayed him into sin. Let him, with these motives, come, in entire confidence that what he whispers into the ear of the priest is committed to a more inviolable secrecy than if it were drowned in the Pacific Ocean,—that the confessor must sooner allow himself to be torn limb from limb than breathe the slightest hint of things even remotely affecting the recital. Let him know that the priest sits there not as man, nor receiving his penitent's tale of sorrow merely as a sympathizing friend, nor resolving his doubts as an able theologian and nothing more, nor showing him the remedies for sin simply as a person of sanctity and spiritual experience, whose own triumph over temptation has taught him how best to reach forth a guiding hand to the support of feebler steps. But let the penitent whom we are supposing recognise in the tribunal to which he draws near, the immediate appointment and delegated authority of the Most High; let him look on the priest who sits there as invested by the Lord Himself with the awful yet most gracious power of the keys, to bind and loose in His name; and let him be prepared to hear and accept the councils fitted to his peculiar case, the rules for avoiding such falls in future, and the penance imposed in satisfaction for the past, as coming to him with all the power of that which is at once a promise and a command, "He that heareth you heareth Me."

Confessions, such as we have tried to sketch, are being made daily, hourly, to the priests of the Catholic Church; and we might fairly ask a plain question of any one who really believed in the gift of the keys as the gospels set it before us, whether he could bring himself to think that a gift so distinct and peculiar (if really given at all) meant only the power of declaring in a general way that Almighty God pardoned the penitent, or of confirming that declaration by the words of Scripture. Any educated person, it is plain, could bid the congregation in the Communion Service of the Established Church "hear the comfortable words" which contain that promise, just as well as the minister; only the propriety of conducting the service in an orderly manner would make it inexpedient. But this cannot be the gift of the keys: it must be something quite beyond and apart from this. We are supposing a Protestant to feel that the awful power has really been committed by God to man, as God Himself has declared; and the plain question we wish to ask him is: Can you suppose such a power to be exercised without the priest's knowing the state of the penitent's conscience? Or can he ascertain the state of that conscience without going into detail, and (if need be) asking questions? Otherwise, how completely must he be firing into the dark, with a kind of hit-or-miss imprudence! What random and ruinous work for souls, what blind leading of the blind, what daubing with untempered mortar! Only take for a moment the parallel case already alluded to—the science of medicine. Very distressing inquiries have frequently to be made by the respected family physician, and made of those in whose case we should most shrink from the idea of having them made at all. What, then, renders such an idea even tolerable? Simply and solely the absolute necessity of the case. Without ascertaining his ground, and ascertaining it fully and distinctly, his science would be a blank, and you would not get him to risk either his own professional character or the life of his patient upon any insufficient guess-work or mere likelihoods. Such being the case, we acquiesce, even as regards those who are nearest and dearest to us. Health is a jewel; and though we had much rather there were no necessity for consulting the doctor, yet as the necessity exists, the doctor is consulted. It never enters our heads, therefore, to get up public meetings,—to come upon the platform and denounce all the medical practitioners in London or in England for simply doing their duty. We do not bring forward an array of the books they have studied to acquire their knowledge, nor enlarge upon the hatefulness of a course of dissection in the medical schools, and the deteriorated tone of mind it must induce in the practitioners. Good sense keeps us from all this; for we see at a glance how easy would be the reply. Our next-door neighbor, be he who he might, would answer at once,—My good friend, as long as we have these mortal bodies, with "all the ills that flesh is heir to," we must submit to take advice when they are out of order; and, far from quarrelling with the physicians, or abusing medical science, you ought to be glad that the science has been invented, improved, tested, and brought to a system; and grateful, moreover, to those

who undertake an office which must often be nearly as painful to themselves as to their patients.

TO BE CONTINUED.

**Foreign Tongues.**

Bobby (to young Featherly, who is making an evening call—"Will you speak a little French for me before you go, Mr. Featherly?")  
Featherly, smiling—"Certainly, Bobby, if you wish it."  
Bobby—"I do. Ma says your French is very amusing."

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WHEREAS since the completion of the allotment of the 1,400,000 acres of and set apart under the Manitoba Act to extinguish the Indian title of the Children of the Province of Manitoba, on the 15th July, 1870, a large number of additional claimants have come and some are still coming forward with the evidence necessary to prove that they are children of Half-breed heads of families and were residents of Manitoba at the date mentioned;

And whereas the 1,400,000 acres set apart under the Manitoba Act aforesaid have been exhausted by such allotment, and by Order in Council, dated the 29th April, 1885, it has been decided to extinguish such additional claims, known as "Supplementary Claims," by an issue of \$240.00 in scrip to each Half-breed child entitled;

And whereas, by the Act 37 Vic., Cap. 20, the Half-breed heads of families resident in the said Province on the date mentioned, and the "Original White Settlers," and the children of such settlers, as defined in said Act, are each entitled to receive scrip to the extent of \$100.00.

And whereas, His Excellency the Governor General in Council has deemed it expedient to limit the time within which all claims of the nature above specified may be presented; therefore,

PUBLIC NOTICE is hereby given that under the authority contained in the Order in Council above mentioned, bearing date the 20th April, 1885, all claims under and by virtue of the provisions of the said Order in work or mere likelihoods. Such being the case, we acquiesce, even as regards those who are nearest and dearest to us. Health is a jewel; and though we had much rather there were no necessity for consulting the doctor, yet as the necessity exists, the doctor is consulted. It never enters our heads, therefore, to get up public meetings,—to come upon the platform and denounce all the medical practitioners in London or in England for simply doing their duty. We do not bring forward an array of the books they have studied to acquire their knowledge, nor enlarge upon the hatefulness of a course of dissection in the medical schools, and the deteriorated tone of mind it must induce in the practitioners. Good sense keeps us from all this; for we see at a glance how easy would be the reply. Our next-door neighbor, be he who he might, would answer at once,—My good friend, as long as we have these mortal bodies, with "all the ills that flesh is heir to," we must submit to take advice when they are out of order; and, far from quarrelling with the physicians, or abusing medical science, you ought to be glad that the science has been invented, improved, tested, and brought to a system; and grateful, moreover, to those

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Arrive Chicago	1:25 a.m.	Wed	1:25 a.m.	Wed	1:25 a.m.	Wed	1:25 a.m.	Wed	1:25 a.m.
Arrive St. Thomas	2:45 "	Wed	2:45 "	Wed	2:45 "	Wed	2:45 "	Wed	2:45 "
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