Bellarmine's Construction inadmissible.

BOOK VI.  Ch. iv. ii.

"certain, that the name of penitents in the Fathers' writings signifies only public penitents; certain, that to hear the confessions of the rest was more than one could possibly have done; certain, that Sozomen, to shew how the Latin Church retained in his time what the Greek had clean cast off, declareth the whole order of public penitency used in the Church of Rome, but of private he maketh no mention."

And, in these considerations, Bellarmine will have it the meaning both of Socrates and of Sozomen, that the former episcopal constitution, which first did erect penitentiaries, could not concern any other offenders, than such as publicly had sinned after baptism; that only they were prohibited to come to the holy communion, except they did first in secret confess all their sins to the penitentiary, by his appointment openly acknowledge their open crimes, and do public penance for them; that whereas, before Novatian's uprising, no man was constrained to confess publicly any sin, this canon enforced public offenders thereunto, till such time as Nectarius thought good to extinguish the practice thereof.

Let us examine therefore these subtle and fine conjectures, whether they be able to hold the touch. "It seemed good," saith Socrates, "to put down the office of these priests which had charge of penitency"; what charge that was, the

n of om. D.

"presbyter satisfaceret tanta multi-udini, quantum Constantinopolii, vel in aliis civitatis, penitentiae remedio indegebatur: non igitur omnes eum Presbyterum adire cogebatur, sed si solum, qui penitentiam publicam suscepi-
bant."

"Sozomenus, ubi disputes verba affirmasset, constitutionem de Presbytero penitentiali, quam prisci Episcopi invenierant, et Nec-
tarius postea Constantinopolii abrogaverat, Romae potissimum ac-
curare servari; continuo explicare coepit ritum penitentiae publice, quia Romae suo tempore servabant: igitur constitutio illa ad solos penitentes publicos pertinebat."

"Colligimus, constitutionem Episco-
porum, de qua historici loquuntur, id solum complexam, ut qui publice lapsi essent post Bap-
tismum, iis ad sacram Eucharistiam non accederent, nisi Presbytero penitentiarium privatim omnia pecta-
cata sua confessi essent, et deinde ad eum arbitrium publicum coram eodem Ecclesiae pecata publica detentissim, et penitentsiam publicam egissent... Ante eorum haeresin Novatii, nemo cogebatur certum Presbyterum adire, neque pecata ulia publice cosferi... Ceterum post Novatii haeresin excitatam, placuit Episcopis ali-
quid addere, ne Novatiani Catholi-
cici reprehendere possent quod nimis facile lapsos ad commu-
nionem admitterent..."

1 Tote est the metanoia pepeliev probedionous. [Hist. Eccles. lib. v. c. 19.]

Penitentiaries not in order to Public Confession.

BOOK VI.  Ch. iv. ii.

kinds of penitency then usual must make manifest. There is often speech in the Fathers' writings, in their books frequent mention of penitency, exercised within the chambers of our own heart, and seen of God, and not communicated to any other, the whole charge of which penitency is imposed of God, and doth rest upon the sinner himself. But if penitents in secret being guilty of crimes whereby they knew they had made themselves unfit guests for the table of our Lord, did seek direction for their better performance of that which should set them clear; it was in this case the Penitentiary's office to take their confessions, to advise them the best way he could for their soul's good, to admonish them, to counsel them, but not to lay upon them more than private penance. As for notorious wicked persons, whose crimes were known, to con-vent, judge, and punish them, was the office of the ecclesiastics consistory; Penitentiaries had their institution to another end. Now unless we imagine that the ancient time knew no other repentance than public, or that they had little occasion to speak of any other repentance, or else that in speaking thereof they used continually some other name, and not the name of repentance, whereby to express private penitency; how standeth it with reason, that wheresoever they write of penitents, it should be thought they meant only public penitents? The truth is, they handle all three kinds, but private and voluntary repentance much oftener, as being of far more general use; whereas public was but incident unto few, and not oftener than once incident unto any. Howbeit, because they do not distinguish one kind of penitency from another by difference of names, our safest way for construction is to follow circumstance of matter, which in this narration will not yield itself applicable only unto public penance, do what they can that would so expound it.

They boldly and confidently affirm, that no man being compellable to confess publicly any sin before Novatian's time, the end of instituting penitentiaries afterward in the Church, that by them men might be constrained unto public confession. Is there any record in the world which doth testify this to be true? There is that testifieth the plain contrary. For Sozo-
men declaring purposely the cause of their institution, saith 1, "That whereas men openly craving pardon at God's hands (for public confession, the last act of penitency, was always made in the form of a contrite prayer unto God), it could not be avoided but they must withal confess what their omissions were; this in the opinion of their prelates 2 seemed from the first beginning (as we may probably think) to be somewhat burthensome; 3 not burthensome, I think 4, to notorious offenders; for what more just than in such sort to discipline them? but burthensome, that men whose crimes were unknown should blaze their own faults as it were on a stage, acquainting all the people with whatsoever they had done amiss. And therefore to remedy this inconvenience, they laid the charge upon one only priest, chosen out of such as were of best conversation, a silent and a discreet man, to whom they which had offended might resort and lay open their lives. He according to the quality of every one's transgressions appointed what they should do or suffer, and left them to execute it upon themselves. Can we wish a more direct and evident testimony, that the office here spoken of was to ease voluntary penitents from the burthen of public confessions, and not to constrain notorious offenders thereunto? That such offenders were not compellable to open confession till Novatian's time, that is to say, till after the days of persecution under Decius the emperor, they of all men should not so peremptorily avouch; with whom if Fabian bishop of Rome, who suffered martyrdom the first year of Decius, be of any authority and credit, it must enforce them to reverse their sentence, his words are so plain and clear against them: 5 "For such as commit those crimes, whereof the Apostle hath said, They that do them shall never inherit the kingdom of heaven,

1 Prelate E.  
2 The following clause to the repetition of the word burthensome is omitted in E.  
3 Confessions E.  
4 In the first E.

2 Fab. Decret. Ep. 2. tom. i. Conc. p. 358. ["Illi qui illa perpetrant, de quibus Apostolus alit "Quoniam qui talia agent regnum "Dei non consequentur, valde cani "vendi sunt, et ad emendationem, "si voluntarie noluerint, compel- lundi; quia infamia macuis sunt "asperi, et in barathrum delabun- tur, nisi eis sacerdotali auctorit- te subventum fuerit." Conc. ed. Labb. et Cossart. l. 643. The epi- stle is believed to be spurious.]

1 Hessels E.

* xii. D.  
* Hessler E.

Hessilis' Explanation untenable. 43

"must," saith he, "be forced unto amendment, because they "slip down to hell, if ecclesiastical authority stay them not." Their conceit of impossibility, that one man should suffice to take the general charge of penitency in such a church as Con- stantinople, hath arisen from a mere erroneous supposal, that the ancient manner of private confession was like the shrift at this day usual in the Church of Rome, which tieth all men at one cer- tain time to make confession; whereas confession was then neither looked for till men did offer it, nor offered for the most part by any other than as were guilty of heinous transgressions, nor to them any time appointed for that purpose. Finally, the drift which Sozomen had in relating the discipline of Rome, and the form of public penitency there retained even till his time, is not to signify that only public confession was abrogated by Nectarius, but that the West or Latin Church held still one and the same order from the very beginning, and had not, as the Greek, first cut off public voluntary confession by ordaining, and then private by removing Penitentiaries.

Wherefore to conclude, it standeth, I hope, very plain and clear, first against the one Cardinal, that Nectarius did truly abrogate confession in such sort as the ecclesiastical history hath reported; and secondly, as clear against them both, that it was not public confession only which Nectarius did abolish.

[12.]* The paradox in maintenance whereof* Hassels 1 wrote purposely a book touching this argument, to shew that Necta- rius did but put the penitentiary from his office, and not take away the office itself, is repugnant to the whole advice which Eudamon gave, of leaving the people from that time forward to their own consciences; repugnant to the conference be- tween Socrates and Eudaimon, wherein complaint is made of some inconvenience which the want of the office would breed; finally, repugnant to that which the history declareth concerning other churches, which did as Nectarius had done before them, not in depositing the same man (for that was impossible) but in removing the same office out of their churches, which Nectarius had banished from his. For which cause
Bellarmine[^1] doth well reject the opinion of Hessels, howsoever it please Pametius[^2] to admire it as a wonderful happy invention. But in sum, they are all gravelled, no one of them able to go smoothly away, and to satisfy either others or himself with his own conceit concerning Nectarius.

[^2]: Non [nec E.] est quod sibi blandiantur illi de facto Nectarii, cum id potissimus secreturn peccata torum confessionem comprobit, et non alid quam Presbyterum pneniamentalem illo officio sibi movet.

[13.] Only in this they are stiff, that auricular confession Nectarius did not abrogate, lest so much should be acknowledged, it might enforce them to grant that the Greek church at that time held not confession, as the Latin now doth, to be the part of a sacrament instituted by our Saviour Jesus Christ, which therefore the Church till the world’s end hath no power to alter. Yet seeing that as long as public voluntary confession of private crimes did continue in either church (as in the one it remained not much above two hundred years, in the other about four hundred) the only acts of such repentance were; first, the offender’s intimation of those crimes to some one presbyter, for which imposition of penance was sought; secondly, the undertaking of penance imposed by the Bishop; thirdly, after the same performed and ended, open confession to God in the hearing of the whole church; whereupon ensued the prayers of the Church; then the Bishop’s imposition of hands; and so the party’s reconciliation or restitution to his former right in the holy sacrament: I would gladly know of them which make only private confession a part of their sacrament of penance, how it could be so in those times. For where the sacrament of penance is ministered, they hold that confession to be sacramental which he receiveth who must absolve; whereas during the fore-rehearsed manner of penance, it can no where be shewed, that the priest to whom secret information was given did reconcile or absolve any for how could he, when public confession was to go before reconciliation, and reconciliation likewise in public thereupon to ensue? So that if they did account any confession[^3] sacramental, it was surely public, which is now abolished in the Church of Rome; and as for that which the Church of Rome doth so esteem, the ancient neither had it in such estimation, nor thought it to be of so absolute necessity for the taking away of sin.

But (for any thing that I could ever observe out of them) although not only in crimes open and notorious, which made men unworthy and incapable of holy mysteries, their discipline required first public penance, and then granted that which St. Hierom mentioneth, saying, “The priest layeth his hand upon the penitent, and by invocation entreateth that the Holy Ghost may return to him again, and so after having enjoined solemnly all the people to pray for him, reconcileth to the altar him who was delivered to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, that his spirit might be safe in the day of the Lord.”—Although I say not only in such offences being famously known to the world, but also if the same were committed secretly, it was the custom of those times, both that private intimation should be given, and public confession made thereof; in which respect, whereas all men did willingly the one, but would as willingly have withdrawn themselves from the other, had they known how; “Is it tolerable,” saith St. Ambrose[^4], “that to sue to God thou shouldst be ashamed, which blushest not to seek and sue unto man? Should it grieve thee to be a suppliant to him from whom thou canst not possibly hide thyself; when to open thy sins to him, from whom, if thou wouldest, thou mightest in nothing be known?”

[^4]: Ambros. de Pænit. lib. ii. cap. 10. [“An quisquam ferat ut erat bescas Deum rogare, qui non erat bescis rogare hominem et pudeat et Deo suppliantem, quem non lateas, cum te non pudet peccata tua homini, quem lateas, confiteri? An testes precationis et conscios refugia, cum si homini satisfaciendum sit, multos necessum est abiasque obsequi et digentur intervenire; ad genua te ipse prosternas, oscularis vestiga, filios offeras culpe adhuc ignaros, paternæ etiam venire precatos? Hoc ergo in ecclesias facere fastidium S. Io. de Suppl. et patrocinio tibi ad obsecandum sanctum bescas requisistis: ubi nihil est quod pudori esse debit, nisi non fateris, cum omnes simus peccatores; ubi ille laudabilior, qui humilior, ille justior, qui sibi abjectior.” t. iii. p. 435.]
of forcible repentance, they should not only receive whatso-
ever they had lost by sin, but also after this their new enfran-
chisement, aspire to the endless joys of that supernal city?"

To conclude, we every where find the use of confession, especially public, allowed of and commended by the Fathers; but that extreme and rigorous necessity of auricular and private confession, which is at this day so mightily upheld by the church of Rome, we find not. It was not then the faith and doctrine of God's Church, as of the papacy at this present, 1. * That the only remedy for sin after baptism is sacramental penitency. 2. That confession in secret is an essential part thereof. 3. That God himself cannot now forgive sins without the priest. 4. That because forgiveness at the hands of the priest must arise from confession in the offender, therefore to confess unto him is a matter of such necessity, as being not either in deed, or at the least in desire performed, excludeth utterly from all pardon, and must consequently in Scripture be commanded, wheresoever any promise of forgiven-
ness is made. No, no; these opinions have youth in their countenance; antiquity know them not, it never thought nor dreamed of them.

[14.] But to let pass the papacy. Forasmuch as repentance doth import alteration within the mind of a sinful man, whereby through the power of God's most gracious and blessed Spirit, he seeth and with unfeigned sorrow acknowledgeth former offences committed against God, hath them in utter detestation, seeketh pardon for them in such sort as a Christian should do, and with a resolute purpose setteth himself to avoid them, leading as near as God shall assist him, for ever after, an unspotted life; and in the order (which Christian religion hath taught for procurement of God's mercy towards sinners) confession is acknowledged a principal duty; yea, in some cases, confession to man, not to God only; it is not in the reformed churches denied by the learned sort of divines, but that even this confession, cleared from all errors, is both lawful and behoefeful for God's people.

* First E. 1 Secondly E.; and the mistake is continued throughout this enumeration. 2 sin E. 3 offenders E. 4 xiii. E.

1 Calv. Inst. lib. iii. cap. 4. § 7. * contendere confessionem de qua Miro autem qua fronte asunt quoquantur juris esse divini; cujus
Confession in our Church, public and private.

men should at certain times confess their offences to God in the hearing of God's ministers, thereby to shew how their sins displease them; to receive instruction for the warier carriage of themselves hereafter; to be soundly resolved, if any scruple or snare of conscience do entangle their minds; and, which is most material, to the end that men may at God's hands seek every one his own particular pardon, through the power of those keys, which the minister of God using according to our blessed Saviour's institution in that case, it is their part to accept the benefit thereof as God's most merciful ordinance for their good, and, without any distrust or doubt, to embrace joyfully his grace so given them, according to the word of our Lord, which hath said, "Whose sins ye remit they are remitted." So that grounding upon this assured belief, they are to rest with minds encouraged and persuaded concerning the forgiveness of all their sins, as out of Christ's own word and power, by the ministry of the keys.

[15] It standeth with us in the Church of England, as touching public confession, thus:

First, seeing day by day we in our Church begin our public prayers to Almighty God with public acknowledgment of our sins, in which confession every man prostrate as it were before his glorious Majesty crieth guilty against himself; and the minister with one sentence pronounceth universally all clear, whose acknowledgment so made hath proceeded from a true penitent mind; what reason is there every man should not under the general terms of confession represent to himself

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