

ADVICE FOR THOSE WHO EXERCISE
THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION THROUGH
CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

BEING

THE ABBÉ GAUME'S
MANUAL FOR CONFESSORS

OR HIS

EXTRACTS FROM THE WORKS OF S. FRANCIS DE SALES,
CHARLES BORROMEO, S. PHILIP DE NERI, S. FRANCIS XAVIER,
AND OTHER SPIRITUAL WRITERS

ABRIDGED, CONDENSED, AND
ADAPTED TO THE USE OF THE ENGLISH CHURCH

WITH A PREFACE
EMBODYING ENGLISH AUTHORITIES ON CONFESSION

BY THE

REV. E. B. PUSEY, D.D.
CANON OF CHRIST CHURCH, OXFORD.

SECOND EDITION.

SOLD BY
JAMES PARKER & CO., OXFORD,
AND 377, STRAND, LONDON.
1878.

Project Canterbury AD 2003

PREFACE OF THE EDITOR.

THE MANUAL, (which, abridged, condensed and adapted to the circumstances and principles of the Church of England, is now, at last, given as one of the latest gifts which at the age of seventy-seven I can hope to give to my Mother, the Church of England) was my instructor, before the office of hearing Confessions found me, shrinking from it. Through the knowledge of souls and of the way, in which man may, by the grace of God, best draw them to God, it has very much, which may be useful to the Parish priest, whose people may not be led to use confession to man. All Parish priests have to minister to the sick and dying; to give advice to those who relapse, or are habitual sinners, or who will not give up proximate occasions of sin. All have to guard the young; some meet with the scrupulous. How best to profit by communions or meditation, it might fall to any one to teach. The intercourse with those who have been brought into contact with the inmost depths of the human soul, must be beneficial to all.

In supplying this help to those who minister in this special way to human souls, it is well to call to mind that this wide restoration of confession has been of God's Holy Spirit, through men's consciences and the teaching of our Prayer-book. Somewhat more than forty years ago, there was taught a strict doctrine of the great offensiveness and ingratitude of a Christian's sins, and of the minute searching accuracy of God's judgement in the Day of account, and a somewhat strict doctrine of repentance. Men asked, what should they do against that great Day? The Prayer-book gave the answer: "Here shall the sick man be moved to make a special confession of his sins, if he feel his conscience troubled with any weighty matter." It is here represented as *desirable*, that the sick man should make special confession of his sins, if he have any weighty matter on his conscience. But clearly it could not be the mind of the Church of England, that those who have such weighty matters on their consciences should delay the confession of them to a sick bed, which they may never see, or when their minds may be too confused to speak or remember distinctly, or they may be too distracted by racking pain to confess as they should wish. "In the midst of life, we are in death." It must then be the mind of the Church of England, that whatever she holds it desirable to be confessed in death, should be confessed in life, while the mind is clear. "How could I have confessed all this amid the distractions of a sick bed?" many a soul has said, after having made the confession of the grave evil deeds of its life. The proverb says, "Better late, than never;" but the proverbial truth implies, "better still, not late." I do not mean that the Church of England recommends habitual confession; but I *do* mean that she does virtually recommend the confession at any time of any sin, which, if not confessed before, she would recommend to be confessed on the sick-bed. Yet what a mass of sins, which every body must hold to be "weighty matters," is implied (not to go further) by the fact, that tens or, I fear, hundreds of thousands gain their subsistence through the daily sins of others; each of whom has, I suppose, been in each year the occasion or accomplice of the sins of some 365 persons. "You men," said one of them to one who was labouring to convert her, "have made us what we are."

2. On the other hand, it is a class of tender consciences, whom the Church of England contemplates in the exhortation before Holy Communion, who, although following the advice there given, "cannot quiet his own conscience herein," and whom in

such case she advises to “open his grief” “to some discreet and learned minister of God’s word,” with a view primarily that he may receive the benefit of absolution, and secondarily (for it says “together with”) ghostly counsel and advice. But since “grievous sins” and relapses after temporary remorse or penitence make up the life of too many, and Holy Communion is our “daily bread,” it is clear that, according to her mind, there will be much confession of such as have fallen into deadly sin, or contrariwise of those whose consciences are tender and who feel “the burden” of any sin to be “intolerable.”

However, I do not mean here to argue, but to state facts. It was a prevailing habit somewhat more than forty years ago, to speak lightly of sins committed before any one’s conversion or marriage, when sins were broken off or the temptation to them ceased. The popular doctrine was what John Keble called the doctrine of Protestantism,¹ “every man his own absolver,” and since we are mostly on easy terms with ourselves, the terms of self-absolution were commonly very easy. It was a quiet easy-going time, and so repentance partook of the general easiness. There was apparently little memory of past deadly sin, except an occasional thankfulness, that anyone was no longer guilty of it. Abiding sorrow even for deadly and forgiven sin certainly was not part of their teaching. There was not even the “Would God I had never been such,” which S. Augustine uses of the sins, into which he fell, when he was unbaptised and so not yet a member of Christ. No wonder then that an unqualified teaching of the gravity of post-Baptismal sin fell on people’s hearts like a thunderclap. It fell, doubtless, sometimes on tender consciences, whom God had not made sad. Some accused it of Novatianism, which of course could not have been, had there been any ordinary mention of confession or Absolution. Any how, I did not hear any mention of it, or make any.

The practice spread from conscience to conscience, before there was any oral teaching as to the remedy. Living men, whose minds were stirred, taught the nature of the disease; the Prayer-book, which the Church of England puts into the hands of all her children in their own language, taught the remedy. Without any other living teaching, men (for the enlarged use of confession *began with men*) men, whose consciences were awakened learned to lay down the burden of their sins at our Dear Lord’s Feet: and He, by virtue of His words, “Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them,” said to their inmost souls, “Thy sins be forgiven thee; go in peace.” In those stirring times, people saw the change, wrought in the outward life of their acquaintance, and asked “what has changed you so?” The answer, “I have been to confession,” suggested the thought, “Then it might be good for me too.” There was, of course, a certain amount of oral teaching on the subject, outside of the Prayer-book,² as in the Plain Sermons, 1842,

¹ “The tradition which goes by the name of Justification by faith and which in reality means that one who has sinned and is sorry for it, is as if he had not sinned, blights and benumbs one in every limb, in trying to make people aware of their real state. And this is why I so deprecate the word and the idea of Protestantism, because it seems inseparable to me from ‘Every one his own absolver;’ that is, in other words the same as ‘Peace where there is no peace,’ and mere shadows of repentance.” Keble’s Letters of Spiritual Guidance. Letter xix. p. 40, written between 1846 and 1850.

² The subject of Mr. Wordsworth’s sermon on “Evangelical repentance,” 1841 was, That “the direct testimony of Holy Scripture is much less full and less definite upon the doctrine of the forgiveness of deadly sins after baptism, than (to judge from the tone and language of much of our modern preaching) is often imagined;—that, in fact, it is *scanty*; and no more than sufficient to prove what our Church teaches in her 16th Article.” The remedy which he suggested was public discipline, which, of course, included individual absolution, at its close, that absolution restoring the sinner to the sacraments from which the Church would have previously shut him out. “That the safe, and divinely-appointed way for the recovery of

by the Rev. John Keble, and in a Preface to the Third Part of the Paradise, 1845. Older clergy told me of remarkable instances of confession and restitution, long before our Tractarian days. Even in tepid days the Prayer-book awakened single consciences. It was from circumstances of the times only, that controversialists have said, that more attention was drawn to the teaching by a Sermon of mine before the University, “The entire Absolution of the Penitent,” 1846, because it occurred in a course of Sermons on “Comforts to the penitent,” which had been broken by my suspension for my previous Sermon in that course. To repeat what I said publicly eleven years ago with the freshness of relatively recent memory; “The Prayer-book, not we, taught confession. As a fact, the practice of confession was revived, while [scarce] a word was said about Absolution. The teaching followed the practice; and as it began, so has it continued. The use of confession among us all, priests and people, is very large. It pervades every rank, from the peer to the artisan or the peasant. In the course of this quarter of a century (to instance my own experience, which I must know), I have been applied to, to receive confessions from persons in every rank, of every age, old as well as young, in every profession, even those which you would think least accessible to it—army, navy, medicine, law. But in almost every case (I mean, except some very few in which I suggested it from my knowledge of the individual) the desire came from the persons themselves. And what has been my own experience, has been, as far as I have gathered it, the experience of other clergy. You may think the practice of confession unwise; but you, I am sure, would not restrict our liberty of conscience, and I may say that, in the case of distressing, habitual, and very real sins of young men, they have found confession of the greatest benefit in conquering them. They have been made better members of society through it.”³

I was even scrupulous at that time not to suggest confession to those who individually consulted me. I wished the desire for it to come from themselves, or (as I hoped) from the motions of the Holy Spirit. I wished also that it should be clear, that this revival of confession was the work of God, not of man. One thing I was earnest about, to bring whom I could to repentance for sin, for the love of Him Who has so loved us, our Lord Jesus Christ. My own private conviction was, that if men would review their lives as a whole, bring before themselves all their past sins, the result would be to long to hear our Lord’s absolving voice. But this, as all besides, I left to the teaching of God the Holy Ghost in their hearts. I did not interpose my own.

Nothing was said at that time about the *necessity* of confession. Those who feel a disease do not want to be taught about the *necessity* of a cure. They went to the Great Physician and to those whom He had constituted, under Himself, as physicians of souls. They spake *His* word, and *He* healed them.

And now after more than forty years, during which no one pretends that any knowledge of evil has ever been conveyed through the practice, a storm has been raised against it, which is too well-timed, not to leave some doubt as to the honesty of those who have been raising it. I speak not of the honourable men who have been instruments of raising it, and who thought that they were discharging a public duty in bringing the subject before the legislature, but of the unseen instigators, perhaps I may say of the unseen Instigator, against whose kingdom confession is directed. Here too it may be said,

fallen Christians would seem to be by ecclesiastical discipline, ending in Ministerial Absolution—both from the testimony of Scripture and the practice of the primitive Church.”

³ In *The Times*, Nov. 13, 1866.

“The devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time.”⁴

The plea has been too well adapted to the English mind. “People, ill-informed and inconsiderate, have made a sweeping charge against the practice, as invading the sacredness of the Christian family.”⁵ Because in certain books, a series of questions upon the commandments has been set down, under the head, “How to question the *ill-instructed*,” it has been assumed, that those who hear the confessions of the *well-instructed* wives and daughters of our carefully guarded English homes, put questions upon the seventh commandment, which parents or husbands would not like to hear. Nothing, of course, can be more wholly untrue. The insinuated lie is worthy of its father. Its pleas have been the following.

i. In *some* manuals of Christian practice and devotion, in which the duty of *self-examination* is incidentally treated of, people have been taught how to examine themselves, with much greater nakedness of language, than I myself think advisable. I remember how, above 30 years ago, a mother complained of having found such a popular Roman Catholic manual among her daughter’s books, which she had procured for herself. That manual is one of large circulation among their poor, and since questions of self-examination are like a large net, which is meant to enclose all sorts of consciences, good or bad, it contained questions, which a good conscience would see, at a glance, were not

⁴ Rev. xii. 12.

⁵ Dr. Perowne has thought it worth while to animadvert on this sentence which he says, I “wrote in a style, with which we are all familiar.” He subjoins, “I do not know whether Dr. Pusey would place the late Bishop of Exeter and Mr. Bennett, the Vicar of Frome, in the class of people ill-informed and inconsiderate,” but we see what their opinion is of such Manuals as those for which Dr. Pusey apologises.”

Dr. Perowne will excuse me, if I point out that he has been betrayed into the same paralogism, which he committed before in his animadversions on my book on Daniel the Prophet (in our old Oxford language, the conversion of an affirmative major premiss). I said in that book, that the *Germans* who denied the genuineness of Daniel, were already rationalists, and that approaching that book, as rationalists, they could not but disbelieve its genuineness; for if they had believed a book which contained definite prophecy, they must have given up their disbelief. I pointed out this as an historical fact. The disbelief was the parent of the criticism, not the criticism of the disbelief. I said this, because it was a mischievous fallacy of the day, that the advanced criticism had overthrown the belief in the genuineness of Daniel, whereas the disbelief was only a foregone conclusion of those who already disbelieved all definite Prophecy. Dr. Perowne then represented me as saying, that Dr. Arnold who disbelieved the genuineness of Daniel (which I did not even know) was a rationalist. I said that the *Germans* who first attacked the genuineness of Daniel were rationalists before they attacked it. Dr. Perowne represented me as saying, *All* who have disbelieved the genuineness of Daniel have been rationalists.

So now. Alluding to the recent declamations against the practice of confession in controversial or irreligious periodicals, newspapers, or platforms &c. I said, that “people ill-informed and inconsiderate have made a sweeping charge against the practice, as invading the sacredness of the Christian family.” Dr. Perowne says that he does not know whether I would place the late Bishop of Exeter &c. in the same class; as though I had said, “*all* who ever spoke against confession have been ill-informed and inconsiderate.” Bishop Philpotts was not speaking of confession at all, but only of a popular R. C. book of devotion, in which the detail of the questions would in fact supersede all such questions in hearing confession. Mr. Bennett was writing against “*forced* auricular confession,” whereas the recent declamation has been against *all* confession. I used the words “ill-informed and inconsiderate” (they are very mild words, applying to the mistaken ground of attack, which these persons were not at the pains to understand) of those, who attacked the use of confession in the English Church as a whole. To Bishop Philpotts I explained my own practice as to hearing confessions, (as I did to Bishop Blomfield and Bishop Wilberforce in whose dioceses I chiefly heard confessions) and they were satisfied with my explanations. Bp. Philpotts claimed confession as belonging to the Church of England.

intended for it. Such a conscience would pass them by unread, just as it does not notice certain words in Holy Scripture or the Prayer-book.⁶ Yet I remember its being said that people were becoming “too refined for their Bibles.” Of course, the fault was in themselves. A well-intentioned man published, many years ago, an expurgated edition of Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall*. I remember how an intellectual boy read through Gibbon, for the history’s sake, without observing that it contained any thing against faith or purity.

But accusers have not observed, that the existence of such books of self-examination is only a safeguard the more against their scare-crow, imagined questions in the confessional. *The* object of self-examination is self-knowledge; not, confession. Self-knowledge is a Christian duty. A person cannot repent or confess to God sins, which he knows not of. Since then any one, who hears confessions, may take it for granted that those who confess have used books of self-examination, which contain questions, more or less explicit, on all the commandments, he is the more entirely exempted from questioning about any one. A confessor would, as a matter of course, not suspect any one of any grave sin, of which he did not accuse himself. These accusers would not imagine that a confessor would ask, “Did you ever commit murder?” In books of self-examination, the sixth commandment would be treated of as well as the seventh. It is then only the evil imagination of the accusers, which makes them think that questions would be asked as to the one commandment, which would not be asked as to the other. I doubt not that any one who had received confessions among us, would, if asked, repudiate, as abhorrent from him, the idea that he would ask any question whatever of any one, as to the seventh commandment, unless the person making the confession began the subject by owning that they had something against it to confess.⁷

ii. The second plea has been from certain questions which the accusers found in some Roman books, overlooking or ignorant of the peculiar circumstances which their use presupposes. They were of two classes, as they stood in Latin in the original of the *Manual of Confessors*. I have omitted them in this translation, as unadapted to our circumstances. The one set was for ignorant persons; the other for a general confession, the object of which was to elicit from unwilling persons, who had never been really penitent and had lived in grievous deadly sin, the confession of sins, which the person had concealed, through shame, all his life, still going habitually to confession, but in fact, consciously lying in every confession, pretending to do, what he had never done and had

⁶ Dr. Perowne says, “Never was anything weaker than Dr. Pusey’s defence of a Roman Manual of this sort” (p. 36). I said nothing to *defend* it. On the contrary, I spoke of it as one which used “much, *greater nakedness* of language than I myself think advisable.” But in honesty, I thought it right to add, that I did not think that those questions, naked as they were, would do harm to the pure in heart. The class for whom I should fear, would be the opposite class, minds which were curious about evil, and who might use such a book (as many have the Bible) to acquire a knowledge of evil.

Dr. Perowne proceeds: “As if such words in Holy Scripture or the Prayer-book were given to children as parts of self-examination *with a view to confession!*” The question was not about children at all. No one would put into the hands of children any book with reference to sins which, by reason of their age, they could not commit.

⁷ Dr. Perowne asks “How does Dr. Pusey know that questions are *not* put on the seventh Commandment, ‘which parents or husbands would not like to hear?’ Unless he has been present at all the confessions made in the English Church during the last forty years, he cannot establish his negative.” The source of my knowledge is the united and unanimous voice of all who have any experience in hearing confessions. And this is in accordance with the instincts of human nature. I might retort, since Dr. Perowne has of course not been present at any one confession, he has no ground for encouraging the imputation that they are.

no thought of doing, confess all his deadly sins.

We have only to do with ourselves in the English Church; and, confession to man being voluntary among us, neither of these classes would come to confession at all. With us, no one confesses, except with the purpose of leading a new life, by the grace of God. Those only would come, whose consciences God had stirred; and consciences which God stirred, He would enlighten. Since, with us, confession is voluntary, whatever any person might have to confess, would be those very sins, the memory and weight of which drove him to confession. This would be the "burden" which was "intolerable," which he came to lay down at our Dear Lord's Feet. A person who feels a burden to be too heavy for him to bear alone, does not keep it upon his shoulders or on his heart. Our Lord has stricken the rock,, and by His grace the waters flow. We have then no occasion for questioning at all, except to help anyone to say what he wishes to say, or as to the frequency of the sin confessed; and this, with the view of deepening the contrition, by God's grace. For if the sins confessed are deadly sins, then each separate sin is a separate deadly offence against the infinite Love of our God. If the confession extends over years, then, it often produces a deeper contrition, to see, for the first time, the amount of the deadly heap. "I have," the soul says, "for, it may be, 20 years, committed such a sin against my God every week. I have then committed 1000 of these sins against His infinite Love."

The problem of B. Leonard was altogether different; how best to induce unwilling souls to do, what they had, all their lives long, been professing to do, but had never done,—honestly to confess their sins. It became then a necessity with him, to dwell even chiefly upon that commandment, upon which, generally, questions are most to be avoided.

So again as to ignorance. Of course, we have superabundance of ignorance among what people accustom themselves to call our degraded or outcast populations in London; such as those, whom such Clergy as those of S. Alban's Holborn have won in large numbers to the love of God. My own experience has not been in that class. Sin blinds the sinner. But I think that the difference lies between voluntary and involuntary confession. In Italy or France I should suppose that it might often happen, that e. g. a Neapolitan or Parisian, careless for the rest of the year, might go to confession before Easter, to fulfil his "Easter duties." Many every where wish to serve God as cheaply as they can. It is better, and God is less dishonoured, if His creatures break off their sins even for a month in the year, than if they break with Him altogether. Such an one (if he went to confession at all) would go without serious sifting of his conscience; and if he were to confess at all, would need to be helped to sift it. If, on the other hand, a person, out of whatever previous state, were roused to the sense of his sins in one of our missions, he would know and would have vividly before him, what he had to confess.

There is yet another field of Roman usages, which I should think of extreme difficulty, viz. the confession of mental sins which aggravated the actual sins confessed; in relation to which writers suggest questions for *ill*-instructed souls. These questions have often seemed to me over-minute and superfluous, and I know not how some of them could be put without the risk of teaching evil, happily unknown. They could not, any how, without circuitous preliminaries. Nor do I myself see any good in their being put at all. Our business in this respect is, to guard persons against relapses into sin; to teach true contrition, how to gain the victory over indurated habits; and this can be done by God's grace, without these minute enquiries. National characters also, and so, within certain

limits, temptations and sins vary. I should hope that it would be unwise to put these questions in our Roman Catholic population. Certainly, it would be to our Irish peasantry.

Roman writers themselves feel the extreme difficulty, and frequently warn confessors, that it is better to leave the material confession incomplete, than to run any risk of teaching the penitent the knowledge of any sin, of which he was happily ignorant. For myself, speaking broadly and having reference to questions, which I have omitted out of the earlier part of the Manual, I think it far safer not to use those questions at all. On looking over them carefully, I do not remember that, in nearly 40 years, I ever asked one of them: and I am quite sure that the confessions which I heard, were accepted and blessed by God. For they stood our Blessed Lord's test, "by their fruits ye shall know them."

The wickedness of the adversary has consisted in this, that, knowing, (as he could know) nothing of the facts, he has insinuated, that questions of this sort would be asked of the modest wives and daughters of our English homes, who are happily guarded from knowledge of evil, and who would know nothing of the subject.

Throughout the declamation against an unhappy book, in which "questions for the *ill*-instructed" were inserted (mistaken as I believe them to have been and have said that they were), it has been entirely ignored that they were for the *ill*-instructed. The limitation "for the *ill*-instructed" shews to any who *would* see, that they *were not* for any besides; else the limitation "for the *ill*-instructed" would not have been inserted; yet the declamation has throughout assumed that those questions are for all, the *well*-instructed also, the modest, the refined, those of whom no one could imagine any evil. In all the declamation of the last few months, I have not seen a single allusion to this limitation. Yet it must have changed the whole line of attack. Instead of a vague coarse and libellous declamation against all Clergy who hear confessions, the question raised must have been, "Are there, among our people, any so immersed in ignorance, that, if Almighty God should lead them to repentance, they should have committed such sins as these, and yet not know that they had committed them?" My own experience has brought me in contact with the poorer but not with the ignorant classes, as it did the compiler of that unpublished book, who laboured zealously among them. And he is withdrawn from his labours, so that he cannot tell us, whether, in his experience of many years, he met with such. Intense as the ignorance of some is, who have shut themselves out from all contact with the Church, so that they know neither the name of God, except by swearing, nor that of Jesus, nor even the Lord's Prayer, nor the Ten Commandments, except such of them as human law enforces upon them by its penalties, I do not believe that any whom God calls to Himself would not be enlightened by Him as to the slough, in which they had lived. If they were, there could be no occasion for any of these questions; for those whose minds God had quickened, would, if they used confession, accuse themselves, and would need no such remembrancers. But this fallacy, that questions, especially said to be for the *well*-instructed, were intended for the *well*-instructed, is continued to this hour. Dr. Perowne italicises the expression, "The questions *directed to be made* [The qualification that they were *directed to be made* only "of the *ill*-instructed" he in his haste here omits, although he himself quotes it elsewhere⁸] in the Priest in Absolution, may at least justify the alarm, which he [I] thinks so foolish." The alarm, which, I am sure, is so unfounded, relates to our well-instructed and guarded English families. I have rejected all such questions; but

⁸ p. 35.

questions *directed to be made* of the *ill*-instructed do not justify any alarm as to the *well*-instructed.

An eminently Conservative Journal, in reviewing the prospect for good or evil to the English Church, carries on the cry; "The revelation of the manner, in which the more seriously sacerdotal party within the Church were seeking to revive the practice of confession *in some of its most demoralising and revolting forms*, was a shock to the whole system, hardly comparable to anything short of a necessary but painful surgical operation."⁹

It is contrary to natural instinct to ask questions on that commandment of any one, man, woman or child, who did not shew that they had something to confess upon it. An intelligent person of the middle class said, "I do not go in for these things; but the English Clergy are gentlemen, and I do not believe that they would ask such questions." Great injustice has been done not to us only, but to our English families. But for our habitual English reserve and modesty, and the nature of the subject, in which people cannot even repudiate calumny without a sense of defilement, there would have been one burst of indignation at these implications, that our English Clergy would have asked such questions of our English wives or daughters, or that they would have borne such questions.

Those who, in their passionate attacks upon confession, have, with epithets too filthy to repeat, denounced a particular book, and all confession on the ground of that book, have themselves been the calumniators of the well-educated and pure-minded wives and daughters of our English families, who have used and do use confession, as a means of removing, by the help of God, those lesser infirmities which cleave to our regenerate nature, until "death be swallowed up in victory." They who have acted the zealot for the purity of our English families, have themselves libelled them, as though they would have allowed their ears to be profaned by what was unbefitting for a pure-minded woman to hear. However unscrupulous some had heretofore shewn themselves, as to the weapons which they used, or the allies with whom they united themselves, it is strange that, even in their hatred of confession, they should have flung pitch broadcast in a way, in which it must involve those, of whose pure-mindedness they professed themselves to be the protectors, those, whose purity is the bliss and protection and true dignity of our English families, a fruit of the grace of God, and one of the best earnest of a happy future of our country.

These accusations must have their reaction. Those who have been deluded by them will be shocked, at least, at their own credulity, and will be ashamed of their panic, as Englishmen are of the credulity of their forefathers in believing as to the plot ascribed to Titus Oates.

In this panic men have ignored that the author of, and tempter to, evil is ever busy with souls, and they have aided his work by insinuating that the teacher of evil is, not himself but the Priest. "There are some sins of young men," I had occasion once to say to Bp. Wilberforce, "for which confession is *the* remedy." He said emphatically, "It is."

Enough on the hateful subject. Fanaticism, having been, by the Bennett judgement, baffled in its attack upon our faith, turned to assail the ritual, used by some. Succeeding but partially in this, it has tried to inflame the English people by calumnious insinuations as to matters, upon which it can absolutely know nothing, and which no one

⁹ *The Standard*, Oct. 10.

can refute, because no one is attacked. Such weapons cannot prosper. Conscience is too strong for them. Those into whose hearts God shall put it to pour out their griefs will continue to do it, and the accuser will probably find, as heretofore, that his speaking against the truth will help to direct men's thoughts to it. Declamations against confession will direct people's thoughts inwards, and the conscience will ask, Will it not be good for me?

We, then, who know the value of confession, shall continue to minister to those who come to us. Its continuance will remain with people's consciences. No declamation will dam up what the soul wishes to pour forth. "Naturam expellas furca, tamen usque recurret." Conscience is incompressible as water. It will find its way through the iron-ball, wherein people would confine it. But it would be well, if those who are so diligent in declaiming against confession, which we know to be a remedy or a preventative of sin, would set themselves specifically and earnestly to withstand the sins, through which it has been supposed that more souls perish than through any other,—sins against the 7th Commandment. A Christian widow-lady, who shrank not from seeking out lost women in the wretched dens, in which misery, hopelessness, drink and debt kept them fast-bound, and whose Christian love was indefatigable and fertile in expedients to allure and to extricate them, was met with discouragement, that the efforts were useless, except for those individual souls; for, according to the great law of commercial policy, "the supply was" every where "equal to the demand." True, if they were not souls, for whom Jesus died, to whom she was His messenger and apostle, to rescue them from the jaws of the lion! But who then are the causes of all this misery, whose victims in this Christian land are the hundreds of thousands, countless? The writer of that book, popular through the Christian courage and chivalry of its writer and the resourcefulness of her Christian love, owns truly, that no remedy will be found, until men learn that these, whose sin they occasion, of whose degradation they are the cause, whom, but for the arresting love of Jesus, they would drag down with themselves to the bottomless pit, are their sisters in Christ.

But where then do men learn their sins? Those, who declaim against confession, declaim especially against the use of it, at an early age, e. g. in boyhood. I said publicly eleven years ago, "I believe that it is the experience of those who have heard confessions, that in cases where there has been sin against the 7th Commandment, it has been the exception, where sin, which has, perhaps, desolated or blighted the subsequent life, has not been first fully known, either at 8 or 12 years old, their first or their second school, or the date of their free intercourse with other boys. And what has been specially miserable has been, that almost uniformly sin was not known to be sin, until it had a hold upon the sufferer. All this might be prevented by the simplest, most modest questions, if parents were not afraid of the whole subject. They shrink from an imagined risk of conveying hurtful knowledge, which Satan has taught long before, not for prevention, but in temptation. I have ventured to say this on this delicate subject, because no one who does not already know to what I allude—no lady who reads your paper—can in the least understand it, or be supposed by others to understand it."¹⁰

One, who knew nothing of confession, neither having made nor heard one, said that evils; such as I alluded to, were "best, with the very barest exception, ignored." I

¹⁰ Letter in *The Times*, Dec. 12, 1866.

answered¹¹; “The plan of ‘ignoring’ has been tried. I remember many years ago the Head Master of a large school refusing to allow of a book of self-examination being circulated in his school, unless all allusion to the 7th Commandment were omitted. And at that time every boy probably in the school knew all which that very respectable Head Master wished to keep from them. And what has been the result of ‘ignoring?’ Fifty years ago, before the intercourse with the Continent¹² had been much renewed, I have reason to believe that that sin was unknown at most of our public schools. Now, alas! it is the besetting trial of our boys; it is sapping the constitutions and injuring in many the fineness of intellect. ‘If I had hut known confession then,’ (it has often been said to me, and now is written to me), ‘I should not have had all this misery.’ And I know that confession became a remedy against this evil, when its victim had long struggled in vain.”

I will only instance further, that in a school, which I do not know, at a date which I do not know, but sometime past (so there can be no imputation of a violation of the seal), before confession, out of 100 boys, 10 only were innocent; after confession, 68: the more aggravated forms of the sin fell from 66 to 4.

My object, however, now is not to insist on the value of confession, but to urge that those who declaim against confession, should do what in them lies against a terrible evil. To ‘ignore’ it, is to foster it, and to leave free scope to Satan. The evil of which I write is, I have understood, absolutely unknown in schools, where confession is habitually used. “My seminarists,” said the Bishop of Coutances to me in 1866, “are pure as the angels.” But, apart from confession, very much might be done to check evil, if those who have the care of schools did but preach positively on purity. “We do not know,” said a middle-aged Clergyman to me, some years past, who was educated at Winchester, “what we owe to Dr. Moberly. He preached to us ‘purity,’ ‘purity,’ ‘purity.’” I said in this correspondence of many years past, “I believe that parents might save countless ills to their sons by this simple rule, ‘Do nothing, when alone, which you would be ashamed of your mother and my knowing.’ I have known evil stopped by the simple words, ‘Remember, that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost.’ I do not, then, believe that there is any occasion for the detailed questions to which S. G. O. refers. I believe that the conscience may be quickened without them.”

The devoted writer of “Work in Brighton,”¹³ herself a lady, urges the same upon “every mother for the sake of her own boys, not to remain any longer in sinful ignorance, as we have hitherto been content to do, but to face this subject; never to send a boy unwarned and unarmed to a public school. I would entreat you not to leave this vital point to a father’s influence; remember that in your own womanhood you have a potent

¹¹ Letter in *The Times*, Dec. 14, 1866.

¹² I did not say this, in reference to any particular countries, as if such sins were prevalent (as a Roman Controversialist imputed to me) in countries nominally Roman Catholic. I spoke of the *Continent* of Europe, of which a large portion has been rent from the Roman Church. But even in countries, nominally Roman, there must be too many, who belong to the body of the Church, not to its soul: many also belong to no religious body at all. Even of France the late gifted and observant Abp. of Paris, Mgr. Darboy, said to me ‘We have lost the middle classes.’ I meant simply to mark a date, as suggested by the ignorance as to the sin, in our largest public school at that time. It was then, I believe, a continental sin, at that time happily unknown to it. Books, containing remedies for it, had some years ago a separate head in some German book-catalogues, which, when I was enquiring about remedies for it, were procured for me.

¹³ p. 43. Hatchard’s.

weapon of defence for your boy, which no man can have. See that he knows all he ought to know from pure lips, and not have to gather it from the impure talk of school-boys, innocent curiosity being too often the source of much evil. Teach him from his earliest years the sacredness of his body, that it is a temple of the Holy Ghost, not his own to do what he likes with, but subjected to certain physical and moral laws imposed by an infinite Will, the violation of which must lead to its derangement, and to ill results which must fall on others, as well as himself; for never let him think he can sin and suffer alone; and entreat him never to indulge in actions and talk which he would be ashamed for you to know of, or which he knows would bring a blush to his sister's cheek."

However, it is not for me to suggest ways, in which others should meet what all who value souls would acknowledge to be a terrible evil, if they would believe its existence. I only meant, "let them not, in their declamations against confession, shut their eyes against the evil, or imply that its teachers must be those whose aim is, by God's grace, to exterminate it."

"What I have asked for," and do ask for, on the side of those who do not use it, was the continuance of the same charitable temper which was so tenderly expressed in our first English Prayer-book, 'Requiring such as shall be satisfied with a general confession not to be offended with them that do use, to their further edifying, the auricular and private confession to the priest; nor those which think needful or convenient, for the quieting of their own consciences, particularly to open their sins to the priest, to be offended with them that are satisfied with their humble confession to God, and the general confession to the Church; but in all things to follow and keep the rule of charity, and every man to be satisfied with his own conscience, not judging other men's minds and consciences, whereas he hath no warrant of God's Word to the same.'¹⁴

What I and others desire is, that we should, both clergy and laity, be free to do what we severally think right before God, not abridging the liberty of others.

I had thought that we might, in these days, have dispensed with any defence of the practice of confession, as being authorised by the formularies of the English Church. An appeal however has been made to the Queen, in the name of "religious liberty" "to repress the practice of Auricular confession which is so repugnant to the consciences and feelings of this Protestant Country." I should be thankful to know that well nigh any thing is "repugnant to the consciences and feelings of this Protestant *Country*," in which every sin is so rife, of which intoxication is characteristic in all Europe, (wherever English, of the lower classes, are found) and is admitted to be increasing, and which has of late years invented a Divorce-court, in which every undefended cause is notoriously a case of collusion, viz. the wife sinned by agreement with her husband, that they might be rid of one another, and free to contract new unions, in which neither party can respect the other, even if they are not the forerunners of future unfaithfulness. But for the question of Protestantism, certainly this is so far a Protestant country, seeing there are so many dissenters in it who are undoubtedly Protestants, only they have no particular ground to meddle with us, as we do not with them, so long as they remain apart, though it is of course our duty to win them if, by God's grace, we can. But (to argue on their own ground first) "are then confession and absolution un-Protestant?" The Lutherans are eminently Protestants, because, historically, this title belongs to them. Having only a

¹⁴ Letter to *The Times*, Nov. 1866.

Presbyterian succession, they have lost the “power of the keys,” and with it they have lost the use of them as to giving Absolution. But at first their belief was clear.

“As to confession, they teach that private Absolution is to be retained in the churches, although the enumeration of all offences is not necessary in confession. For it is impossible, according to the Psalm, Who understandeth his offences?”¹⁵ And¹⁶ “Confession in the Churches is not abolished among us; for the Body of the Lord is not wont to be given save to those who have before been examined and absolved, and the people is taught most diligently as to the faith of the Absolution, of which before there was great silence. Men are taught greatly to value Absolution, because it is the voice of God and pronounced at the command of God. The power of the keys is commanded: and it is mentioned, what consolation it brings to terrified consciences; and that God requires faith that we should believe that Absolution, as a voice sounding from heaven [the German has “not less than if the voice of God sounded from heaven”] and that that faith in Christ truly obtains and receives remission of sins. But of Confession they teach, that enumeration of offences is not necessary, nor are consciences to be burdened by the charge of enumerating all transgressions, because it is impossible to recite all offences, as the Psalm attests &c. But if no sins were remitted, except those recited, consciences could never rest, because they neither see nor can remember many sins. But confession is retained among us, both on account of the very great benefit of Absolution and also for other advantages to consciences.”¹⁷ In the Apology for the Confession¹⁸ it is repeated, “We too retain confession, chiefly for the sake of the Absolution, which is the Word of God which the power of the keys pronounces as to individuals with Divine authority. Wherefore it would be impious to take away private absolution out of the Church. Nor do they understand what is remission of sins or the power of the keys, whoever despise private Absolution. But we have said above in the Confession that we think that enumeration of offences is not necessary of Divine right.”

And since so much is said as to the agreement of our use of confession with that in the Church of Rome, I may add that¹⁹ the Pontifical answer to the Confession of

¹⁵ Conf. Aug. P. i. Art. xi.

¹⁶ Ib. P. ii. Artic, in quib. recensentur abusus mutati. Art. iv. de confess.

¹⁷ This last Article is so far varied in the Confessio Variata that it begins, “But since confession gives occasion for imparting Absolution privately, and the rite itself preserves in the people the understanding of the power of the keys and the remission of sins, besides that that conference very greatly profiteth to admonish and instruct men, we diligently retain Confession of sins in the Churches &c.

¹⁸ Apol. Confess, c. vi. n. 2. Bishop Charles Wordsworth observed many years ago, while yet a Priest [1842], “It is right that those who are content to look *no higher* than the Reformation, and so decline all appeal to the practice of the primitive Church, should bear in mind what the opinion and avowed principle even of the *foreign Reformers*—of the *true and original Protestants* themselves, was upon this point, however little it has been acted out by those who profess to be their followers.”

Besides the Augsburg Confession, he quoted *the Saxon Confession offered to the Council of Trent*, A.D. 1551. “As to the making private Confession to the Pastors, we affirm that the rite of private Absolution is to be retained in the Church, and we do constantly retain it for many grave causes.” C. xvi. De Pœnitentia. Lindan. Apol. P. ii. p. 128. *The Wittenberg Confession* professes (c. de Pœnit.) “that sins are always to be acknowledged, and that penitence is always to be enacted in this life, that after confession of sins faith in the Absolution may be conceived ‘privately’ Ibid, quoted by Bp. Overall in Nichol’s Additional Notes. “*The Ordinance of the Lunenburg Church*’ enjoins very severely that the Eucharist should not be given to any one save after Confession, and absolved by private Absolution; forbidding that Pastors thenceforth should absolve two or three together.”

¹⁹ Responsio ad Conf. Aug. Pontificia, ad Art. xi.

Augsburg approves of its article, only requiring two additions: 1) that confession should be required every year: 2) that preachers should exhort to diligent examination of conscience and confession of the sins which people remembered upon that examination. Else it says, “that in the xith article they [the Lutherans] acknowledge, that private Absolution together with confession is to be retained in the Church, is accepted as Catholic and agreeable to our faith, because Absolution is confirmed by the word of Christ. For Christ saith to the Apostles, John xx. Whose sins ye remit they are remitted to them.”

In the Articles of Smalcald, signed by the chief Lutherans A.D. 1537 and received among their symbolical books, it is said,²⁰ “the keys are the office and power of the Church, given by Christ to bind and loose sins, not the enormous only and manifest sins, but also subtle hidden, known to God alone, as is written in the 19th Psalm, ‘Who understandeth his offences?’ Since Absolution and the power of the keys is also a consolation and help against sin and an evil conscience, instituted by Christ Himself in the Gospel, confession and Absolution are by no means to be abolished in the Church, especially on account of tender and timid consciences and on account of indisciplined and petulant youth, that they may be heard, examined, and instructed in Christian doctrine. And since private Absolution springeth from the power of the keys, it is not to be neglected, but to be made of the greatest account, as other offices also of the Christian Church are greatly to be accounted of.”

The Lutheran body also adapted from Luther, as a symbolical book, his lesser Catechism. One²¹ chapter was “on confession, how those of the simpler sort were to be instructed in it.” It begins, “Confession compriseth two things, one, to confess sins, the other, to receive Absolution or remission from the Confessor or preacher of the Gospel, as if from God Himself, and not to doubt but firmly to believe that, through that Absolution, the sins are remitted before God in heaven. The second question is, what sins are to be confessed? Before God we ought to place ourselves as guilty of all sins, even those which are hidden from us, as we do in the Lord’s Prayer, but, before the minister, we ought only to confess the sins which are known to us and which we feel in our hearts.”

He also provides a brief form of confession for those of the ruder sort, “Thou oughtest in this wise to address the minister of the word, ‘Reverend and beloved lord, I pray thee to hear my confession and announce to me the remission for God’s sake.’ ‘I, miserable sinner, confess before God that I am guilty of all sins; especially I confess before thee that I am a manservant, maidservant &c but that I have not served my master faithfully, for I have not and do not do what he enjoins me: I have vexed and moved my master or mistress to swear: I have neglected many things and given occasion to loss &c: In words and deeds I have been petulant impatient obstreperous &c. [The German adds, I have been angry with my equals, quarrelled with my wife and cursed]. Therefore I grieve, ask for grace, promise amendment.’ A master or mistress has a different form suggested to them: ‘First, I confess before thee, that I have not been diligent in the faithful education and instruction of my children or family to the glory of God; I have blasphemed, abused the Name of God, given a bad example by speaking and doing wrong things, have injured my neighbours, detracted from many, used wrong weights and

²⁰ Art. vii. de Clavibus. Art. viii. de Confessione.

²¹ Catech. minor c. 5.

measures, deceived my neighbour in the articles which I sold &c: and whatever besides occurs in the vocation of each against the Commandments of God.' It is added; "but if any does not feel himself laden with these or graver sins, let him not be anxious nor seek or invent sins nor make confession a torture; but recite one or other sins which he knows as—especially I confess that I abused the Name of God, used unchaste words, neglected this or that &c. So let his mind be at rest." The minister is to answer, "God be propitious to thee and confirm thy faith. Amen." "Let him also ask the person confessing, 'Dost thou believe my remission to be the remission of God?' Let him further say to the person affirming and believing 'Be it unto thee, as thou believest, and I, by the command of our Lord Jesus Christ, remit to thee thy sins in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.' But if any have consciences afflicted, tempted, sad, the minister shall comfort them with many sentences of Scripture tending to the increase of faith." The chapter closes, "This which we have mentioned is only a childish and common form of confession for the simpler and ruder sort."

The preface to the 'Formula of Concord' states²² that "all the Churches of the Confession of Augsburg approved and received these catechisms. So that they were propounded publicly in Churches and schools and some private houses."

The Apology for the Confession of Augsburg says, "Absolution can properly be called the sacrament of penance, as also the more learned Scholastic theologians speak."²³

The negotiations carried on by Henry viii with the German Protestant Princes (although, happily for us, finally broken off by him) brought Cranmer into contact with their work. We have accordingly to all appearance the article on Confession as framed by the German reformers, together with corrections or additions by Cranmer as he thought necessary. The Lutheran theory of justification gleams through here and there, but is not pronounced, so that Cranmer may have understood all in a right sense. The portion relating to Confession is,²⁴

"But since the greater part of the Christian people knows not these things which make up penitence, nor understands how true penitence is to be enacted, nor knows where remission of sins is to be hoped for, in order that it may in all these things be better instructed and taught, preachers and pastors ought, not only in public Sermons to inform the people thereon and sincerely to preach from the sacred Scriptures what is true penitence, but we also say that the confession of sins, which is called auricular and is made privately to the ministers of the Church, is exceedingly useful and in the highest degree necessary." [Cranmer proposed to substitute "most advantageous" (commodissimam) for "in the highest degree necessary" (summe necessariam).]

"Which confession is by all means to be retained in the Church and to be made great account of, both for the instruction of inexperienced persons in the Word of God and other advantages not few, (of which we shall speak presently) and also chiefly on account of the benefit of absolution, that is, the remission of sins, which in this

²² Form. Conc. P. ii. Procem. n. vi. Mathesius (vi. Pred. v. Luth. Lehre &c. Nürnb. 1592) says "in our times above 100,000 copies have been printed, and it has been brought in languages of all sorts into foreign lands, and all Latin and German schools."

²³ c. v. art. xii. n. 31.

²⁴ A book taken from a bundle of Abp. Cranmer's papers in the State Paper Office Art. xi. in Cranmer's Works T. iv. pp. 282—285 ed. Jenkyns. See his preface T. i. pp. xx.—xxiii. I have translated it.

confession is offered and exhibited to those who confess through absolution and the power of the keys, according to that of Christ, John xx. Whose sins ye do remit &c. Which absolution ought to be certainly believed: for it is the voice of the Gospel, whereby the minister through the Word, not in his own name but in the Name and authority of Christ, announces and offers remission of sins to him who confesseth. Which voice of the Gospel, sounding through the minister, when he who confesseth believeth with a certain faith and assenteth thereto, at once his conscience becomes certain of the remission of sins, and he setteth certainly with himself that God is propitious and merciful to him. Which one thing ought exceedingly to move all Christians both to love and embrace by all means that confession, in which, through absolution, the certainty of grace and remission of sins is conceived and confirmed. And in this private absolution the Priest hath power of absolving the person confessing from all sins, even those which are wont to be called 'reserved cases;' yet so that he who is privately absolved is nevertheless (if he be brought to justice) subject to public judgements for open crimes."

"To this are added other advantages of secret confession, one of which is, that unlearned and uninstructed men can nowhere be more advantageously [Cranmer substituted "more advantageously" (commodius) for "more rightly" (rectius)] instructed as to Christian doctrine than in confession. [Cranmer inserts, "so that they obtain a learned and pious confessor."] For since in confession they bring attentive and teachable minds, they attend diligently to the things said by the Priest. Wherefore their faith can be ascertained, and they can be taught and informed by learned and pious pastors or confessors [Cranmer adds, 'out of the Word of God'] what sin is, how horrible a thing it is, and what are the differences of different sins, and how grievously God is angered against sins. For many, because they are ignorant of these things, are grievously disquieted in their consciences, trembling with fear 'there where no fear is;' who (as the Saviour saith,) 'strain out a gnat and swallow a camel,' being exceedingly anxious about the least and lightest sins and not proportionably penitent for the greatest and heaviest. There are some also who, labouring under the like ignorance, almost despair of pardon for their sins, on account of immoderate fear and pusillanimity of mind. Others, on the contrary, in a proud hypocrisy, set themselves up against God, as if they were either without sin or God would not punish them for their sins."

"Now who knows not how useful and necessary [Cranmer proposed 'advantageous' (commoda) for 'necessary' (necessaria)] confession is to people of this sort, of which the one class are to be sternly rebuked and reprov'd out of the Word of God, that they may acknowledge themselves to be sinners, and understand how horribly God punishes sins? On the other hand, that most sweet consolation of the Gospel is to be brought to those who despair out of too exceeding fear. Moreover in confession men may be taught [Cranmer adds 'out of the Word of God'] not only in what way they may overcome the temptations of the devil and mortify the flesh, in order that they may not relapse into the former defilements of their life, but also by what remedies they may flee from all sins, that they should not reign over them. Besides, that humility of mind, whereby, for God's sake, man submits himself to man, and lays open the secrets of his breast, is the guardian and preserver of many virtues. Moreover that modesty and shamefacedness at sin which ariseth from confession, not only indicates a mind truly converted to God, but also draws back and withholds many men from foul deeds. Lastly, as he who confesseth his sins to the minister of the Church simply and as before God,

declares that he has true fear of God, so through this humility of mind he learns more, both to fear and reverence God, and to repress the pride innate in the heart, so that he more readily follows and obeys the Will of God. These things then being so, we in no wise doubt that all good men will judge, that this confession should not only be retained in the Church, but also be held in great price, seeing that it is on so many accounts useful and necessary [Cranmer wished to alter ‘necessary’ (necessariam) into ‘advantageous’ (commodam) and to add, ‘although it be not enjoined in Scripture, yet on the aforesaid grounds’ (licet non sit præcepta in scripturis, tamen prædictis de causis)]. But if there are any who either [Cranmer suggested the insertion of “rashly” (temere)] condemn or reject it, these shew that they neglect and despise both instruction in the Word of God, and the benefit of Absolution (which is given in Confession), and other many and great benefits which are exceedingly useful to Christians, and they do not perceive, that they bring into the Christian world very great licence of sinning, and give great occasion of rushing into every guilt.”

“But as relates to the enumeration of sins, as we do not approve of a scrupulous and anxious enumeration, lest it should cast a snare over the consciences of men, so we judge that a sluggish and supine enumeration in a thing so sanitary is exceedingly perilous and to be avoided.” [In the draught corrected by Cranmer the following addition appears in the margin in his handwriting, “so that he whose conscience is afflicted for one or many sins ought to seek from the priest, consolation counsel and absolution for each in particular, and not to neglect a thing so salutary.” [ut cujus conscientia de peccato uno aut pluribus affligitur, is consolationem, consilium, et absolutionem singulatim a sacerdote petere, et rem tam salutarem non negligere debeat).]

Cranmer expresses his own belief in the Catechism which he published and which, he says, “I wrot.” “God dothe not speake to us with a voyce soundynge out of heaven. But He hath given the kayes of the kingdom of heaven, and the authoritie to forgyve synne, to the ministers of the Church. Wherefore let him that is a sinner go to one of them, let him knowledge and confesse his synne, and praye him that, according to God’s commandement, he will gyve him absolution, and comforte him with the word of grace and forgiveness of his synnes. And when the minister dothe so, then I ought stedfastly to believe that my synnes are truly forgiven me in heaven.”²⁵

As to the alleged discrepancy with the teaching of the Reformers, (although we are not bound to any of their belief save as it is embodied in our formularies) it was, I suppose, on account of their eminence, that, in a party demonstration, three images were set up in the Cross called the “Martyrs’ Memorial,” erected here to their honour. The three selected were Cranmer, Ridley, Latimer. I have already given the opinion of Cranmer. Bishop Latimer says, “But to speak of right and true Confession, *I would to God it were kept in England*; for it is a good thing. And those which find themselves grieved in conscience might go to a learned man and there fetch of him comfort of the Word of God, and so come to a quiet conscience..... *And sure it grieveth me much that such confessions are not kept in England, &c.*”²⁶

Bishop Ridley says, “You have known me long indeed: in the which time it has chanced me, as you say, to mislike some things. It is true, I grant: for sudden changes

²⁵ Cranmer’s Catechism, p. 202.

²⁶ Sermon on the 3rd Sunday after Epiphany, Vol. ii. p. 852.

without substantial and necessary, cause, and the heady setting forth of extremities, I did never love. *Confession unto the minister*, which is able to instruct, correct, comfort, and inform the weak, wounded, and ignorant conscience, *indeed I ever thought might do much good to Christ's congregation, and so, I assure you, I think even at this day.*"²⁷

In regard to the practical teaching of the Church of England, I may set down as a document of secondary authority, i. e. to whose words we are not bound, the Second book of Homilies. Yet we are bound to declare, in general terms, that "it doth contain a godly and wholesome doctrine."²⁸ The Homily, when laying down that, according to the *exact signification of a Sacrament*, Absolution is not such, as having no visible sign commanded in the New Testament, yet declares unhesitatingly, "Absolution *hath* the promise of forgiveness of sins." "For although absolution hath the promise of forgiveness of sin, yet by the express word of the New Testament, it hath not the promise annexed and tied to the visible sign, which is imposition of hands. For this visible sign (I mean, laying on of hands) is not expressly commanded in the New Testament to be used in absolution, as the visible signs in Baptism and the Lord's Supper are: and therefore absolution is *no such* sacrament as baptism and the communion are."²⁹ Even the Second Book of Homilies, though differing somewhat in tone from the first, after speaking against the auricular confession of the Church of Rome, makes reservation for our own freedom to use it.

"I do not say but that, if any do find themselves troubled in conscience, they may repair to their learned curate or pastor, or to some other godly learned man, and shew the trouble and doubt of their conscience to them, that they may receive at their hand the comfortable salve of God's word; but it is against the true Christian liberty that any man should be bound to the numbering of his sins."³⁰

In "the Injunctions given by Edward vith,"³¹ it is assumed that the people will come to confess in Lent, and occasion is taken to give further instruction in the faith, (a knowledge of the faith being required every where as a condition of absolution.)

"They shall in confessions every Lent examine every person that cometh to confession to them, whether they can recite the articles of their faith, the Pater noster, and the Ten Commandments in English, and hear them say the same particularly."

Abp. Parker, as one of the first acts of his office, had to enquire, whether any denied any of the Articles of the Creed, or that mortal sin was remissible by penance.

VI.³² *Item*. You shall enquire of the doctrine and judgement of all and singular head and members of your Church: whether any of them do either privily or openly preach or teach any unwholesome erroneous seditious doctrine, .. or in any other point do persuade or move any not to conform themselves to the order of religion, reformed restored and received by public authority in the Church of England. As for example that every article in our creed, commonly received and used in the Church, is not to be received of necessity; or that mortal or voluntary sins, committed after baptism, be not

²⁷ Letter to one Master West, sometime his chaplain; from Fox. See Eccles. Biog. Vol. iii. p. 67. quoted by Wordsworth App. n. 9. p.71.

²⁸ Art. xxxv.

²⁹ Homily on common prayer and sacraments.

³⁰ Second part of the Homily on repentance. Homilies Part. ii. 2.

³¹ No 9. Cardwell, Documentary Annals T. i. p. 10.

³² Strype's Life of Parker, App. N. liii p. 87. ed. 1711.

remissible by penance, &c. [not “*upon* repentance, but” *by* [the ordinance of] penance.]

Archbishop Parker and the other Bishops also drew up “Interpretations and further Considerations” of the “Injunctions for the better direction of the clergy.”

Among “the articles of the principal heads of religion, prescribed to ministers,” it is said; “The Church of Christ is, wherein the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments are administered according to Christ’s ordinance; and in which the power of the keys is retained.”³³

In a declaration of certain principal articles of religion put forth by Archbp. Parker and the rest of the bishops,

No. iii. begins “I do acknowledge also the Church to be the spouse of Christ, wherein the word of God is truly taught, the sacraments orderly ministered according to Christ’s institution, and the authority of the keys duly used.”³⁴

The Canons of 1603 teach but incidentally on the subject of confession; but the evidence of the use of private confession at that time is the stronger, because it *is* incidental. The Canon does not regulate any thing about confession. Its subject is discipline. It provides, that if, for fear of man or negligence, the Churchwardens or others would not present to the Bishop “such enormities as are apparent in the Parish,” the Clergy of the Parish might do so. But an exception is made of any crime known through confession. “Provided always, That if any man confess his secret and hidden sins to the Minister, for the unburdening of his conscience, and to receive spiritual consolation and ease of mind from him; we do not any way bind the said Minister by this our Constitution, but do straitly charge and admonish him, that he do not at any time reveal and make known to any person whatsoever any crime or offence so committed to his trust and secrecy (except they be such crimes as by the laws of this realm his own life may be called into question for concealing the same,) under pain of irregularity.”³⁵

“The pain of irregularity” (Heylyn says,)³⁶ “as the Canonists tell us, not only doth deprive a man of all his spiritual promotions for the present time, but makes him utterly incapable of any for the time to come, and therefore is the greatest penalty, except degradation from his priesthood, which possibly a Clergyman can be subject to.—In which we see the Church allows of one key only to unlock Confession, and that the Galilean Church doth allow of also. For in the Re-admission of the Jesuits into the University of Paris it was especially conditioned and provided for, amongst other things,³⁷ *That if they heard of any attempt or conspiracy against the King or his Realm or any manner of treason in confession, they* (and all other Clergymen on the like occasions) *should reveal the same unto the Magistrate.*”

Such an exception evinces the more, that confession was an existing practice of the time. It would not have been made in the 18th century, when confession was rare. Canons are made with reference to existing practice. Had it not been at that time notorious, that confession was made to the parish priest, and that widely, such a provision would have been obviously absurd, and an occasion of ridicule. The Canon, however,

³³ in Cardw. Doc. Ann. N. liii. T. i. pp. 236—240.

³⁴ *Ib.* pp. 263, 264.

³⁵ Can. 113.

³⁶ *Theol. Veterum Art. x. P. ii. v. 6.* “The forgiveness of sins.” p. 486.

³⁷ *Contin. of the Fr. hist. p. 36.*

was the basis of Episcopal Visitation Articles, a few years afterwards.

It is difficult to throw ourselves back into the force of documents of a past age; but we may try to picture it. I know not, whether Visitation Articles are much in use now. However, whenever they are used, they would, if directed to the Churchwardens, come into the hands of every Churchwarden of a diocese. We can imagine an enquiry of the Churchwardens; Whether the Clergyman kept his legal residence, or whether he administered Holy Communion so as to enable all the parishioners to receive the “three times a year” enjoined upon all by the Prayer-book? We know in fact that, through official enquiries, the Bishops do know, how frequent the administration of Holy Communion is in every parish in their diocese. In former days it might have been asked, whether Clergymen wore even a Surplice “in all times of their ministration,” or whether there were public Baptisms or Catechisings of children. But what if ten Bishops were to enquire—

- 1) as to the persons excommunicated and of their obtaining their Absolution.
- 2) whether the Minister exhorteth those troubled or disquieted to open their grief, that they may by the Minister receive the benefit of Absolution.
- 3) whether the Minister have revealed any crimes or offences, so committed to his trust and secrecy, contrary to the 113th Canon?

It would require a vivid imagination to conceive, how this fact would be received. The Bishops would of course be denounced as conspiring against the Reformation, and endeavouring to “introduce into the Church of England the teaching and practice of auricular confession, contrary to the teaching of the Word of God, alien to the doctrine principles and order of the Church, fraught with peril to its existence as an establishment, and subversive of the principles of morality, social order, and civil and religious liberty.”³⁸

Yet such were Visitation Articles of a succession of Bishops from 1619—1679, founded on the Canon of 1603. And these Visitation Articles were issued by Bishops, who have been held in reverence ever since for their learning and piety, such as Bishop Andrewes,³⁹ 1629. They were issued also by Overall,⁴⁰ Bp. of Norwich, 1619; and Montague, Bp. of Norwich, 1638; by two bishops of Peterborough in succession,

³⁸ A petition to H. M. Queen Victoria circulated by the Council of the Church Association, to suppress Confession, which all members of the Church of England “both male and female” are requested to sign.

³⁹ Bishop Andrewes omits the words “by the ministry of God’s holy Word” and “together with ghostly counsel and advice.”

⁴⁰ Bp. Montague quotes him as “that right learned and reverend bishop of Norwich, Dr. Overall, of late: a man for admirable learning, and yet of strange humility, in communicating his knowledge unto any poor scholar, hardly equalled, sure outgone by none since the world had him. The 21st Article enquired of in his visitation 1619, concerning ministers, is: ‘Whether doth your minister, before the several times of the administration of the Lord’s supper, admonish and exhort his parishioners, if they have their conscience troubled and disquieted, to resort unto him or some other learned Minister, and open his grief, that he may receive such ghostly counsel and comfort, as his conscience may be relieved, and by the minister he may receive the benefit of absolution, to the quiet of his conscience and avoiding of scruple. And if any man confess his secret and hidden sins, be he sick or whole, to the minister, for the unburthening of his conscience, and receiving such spiritual consolation, doth or hath the said minister at any time, revealed and made known to any person whomsoever, any crime or offence so committed to his trust, contrary to the 113th Canon?’” The Gage &c. p. 83.

Lindsell⁴¹ 1633, and Dee⁴² 1636; by Duppa Bp. of Chichester⁴³ 1638; by Juxon,⁴⁴ Bp. of London, 1640; and having been interrupted by the oppression of the Church during the Great Rebellion, (when even the prayers could not be said except in secret) were resumed by Wren⁴⁵ Bp. of Norwich 1662; Fuller⁴⁶ Bp. of Lincoln 1668; Gunning⁴⁷ Bp. of Ely 1679. The like Articles were put forth by Kent⁴⁸ Archdeacon of Sud-bury about 1631, and by Pory Archdeacon of⁴⁹ Middlesex 1662. Of course, these Bishops wished to revive or secure or guard the use of confession in every parish of their dioceses. Will people be prepared to say that they were, one and all, guilty of the enormities which the recent petition imputes to those who, they say, wish to introduce it?

Much has been said of late about obedience to Bishops, even when they would not put forth their own fatherly authority, but required obedience to the decisions of a Court, one of which has been since reversed. But what would be said, if any of these Bishops were to ask the Churchwardens; “if any person sick or in health (especially before receiving the Holy Communion) [accordingly not *only* in sickness nor before Holy Communion] finding his conscience troubled with any weighty matter, doth for the quieting thereof and for further comfort and counsel, unburthen his conscience to his Priest or Minister, then doth the said Priest or Minister upon special confession of his sins made, together with fruits meet for repentance having been performed, (to both which he is also by the minister to be invited,) upon his repentance administer to him Absolution, together with ghostly counsel and advice? and have you heard that the said Priest or Minister hath revealed or made known at any time to any person whatsoever, directly or indirectly, any crime or offence confessed to him by any such penitents?”⁵⁰

“Doth the Minister exhort his parishioners to make confession of their sins to himself or to some other learned grave and discreet Minister; especially in Lent, against the holy time of Easter, that they may receive comfort and Absolution, and so become worthy receivers of such sacred mysteries?”⁵¹

The 19th Canon of the Irish Church, 1634, goes yet further, requiring that the Minister should give public notice of his readiness to receive confessions before Holy Communion. ““And the minister of every parish, and in Cathedral and Collegiate Churches some principal minister of the Church, shall, the afternoon before the said administration, give warning by the tolling of the bell or otherwise, to the intent that, if

⁴¹ 2nd Report of the Commissioners on rubrics 1868 p. 540. Some of these were quoted in Maskell’s *Doctrine of Absolution*, p. 137. and in my “The Church of England leaves her children free to whom to open their griefs” pp. 115—117. Contemporary copies of the Articles are in the Bodleian. See Catalogue, Articles.

⁴² quoted in Maskell *Doctrine of Absolution* p. 137. “Doth your minister commonly premonish his parishioners, if they be troubled in conscience, to confess and open their griefs to him, that they may receive the benefit of Absolution?” Maskell adds, “almost in the same words within the Diocese of Norwich. 1636.”

⁴³ 2nd Report p. 577.

⁴⁴ *Ib.* p. 591.

⁴⁵ *Ib.* p. 560.

⁴⁶ *Ib.* p. 634.

⁴⁷ *Ib.* p. 648.

⁴⁸ *Ib.* p. 525.

⁴⁹ *Ib.* p. 627.

⁵⁰ Visitation Articles of Bp. Gunning.

⁵¹ Articles of Bp. Montague.

any have any scruple of conscience or desire the special ministry of reconciliation, he may afford it to those that need it. And to this end the people are often to be exhorted to enter into a special examination of the state of their own souls; and that, finding themselves either extreme dull or much troubled in mind, they do resort unto God's ministers, to receive from them, as well advice and counsel for the quickening of their dead hearts and the subduing of those corruptions whereunto they have been subject, as the benefit of absolution likewise for the quieting of their conscience, by the power of the keys, which Christ hath committed to His ministers for that purpose."⁵²

With regard to the writers of the Elizabethan period the less perhaps may be said in them about "private confession," because the great object, at that time, was to restore public confession.⁵³ The attempt failed, through the opposition of the laity. The last expression of the mind of the Church thereon is in the Preface to the Communion service.

Two things, however, have been confused by those who contrast the public penance of the early Church and the private confession in the later Church. They have overlooked that those subjected to the public penance, were in part only "such persons as stood convicted of notorious sin." In their case there was plainly no "confession" at all. Their sin, in whatever way, was "notorious," and those who were convicted thereof, were (like the incestuous Corinthian) separated from the Body of Christ.

But there was another class, outwardly joined with these,—those who, having been guilty of the same sins, but whose sins were hid from all eyes save the all-seeing Eye of God, driven by their own consciences, confessed them and were subjected to the same course of penitence. Plainly it would have been inconsistent that one set of persons, who happened to be detected, should be subjected to a severe course of public penance, and another set, guilty of the self-same sins, should be free from that penance, and go on, as innocent persons, simply because they had not been detected. Anyhow, their consciences would not allow of it. But, although they subjected themselves to the same course of penitence, the actual sins, for which they were so subjected, remained concealed, except from the individual priest whose advice they had taken, whether they should so subject themselves. The public acknowledgement of such sins as would make any one amenable to the laws, might have cost the persons confessing, their life. Those then who voluntarily confessed, confessed the specific sin to a priest whom they themselves selected, and he decided whether the case was one for the course of public penance.⁵⁴

'Public penance' did not then necessarily involve the public confession of the special sin, for which the sinner was subjected to it.

Origen (if the Latin accurately represents the original, it cannot anyhow be far wrong) exhorts at once to private confession and public penitence.

⁵² Constitutions and Canons of the synod of Dublin, 1634. Canon xix. "Warning to be given beforehand for the Communion." Wilkins Conc. iv. 501.

⁵³ Bp. C. Wordsworth in the App. to the sermon on Evangelical repentance puts together notices of these attempts up to A.D. 1580 under the head "Desiderata, what our Church has wished to do." App. pp. 41—68.

⁵⁴ "Our fathers did not command to publish the guilt of women, who had been adulteresses, and who out of godly fear confessed, or were any how convicted, lest we should give occasion of death to them, being convicted; but commanded that they should be placed without communion, until the time of penitence was fulfilled." (S. Basil Ep. 199 (Can. 2.) T, iii. p. 295.)

“See what Divine Scripture teacheth us, that we must not hide sin within. For they too who are oppressed by undigested food or phlegm, if they reject it, are relieved: so they who have sinned, if they conceal and retain the sin within them, are oppressed within and almost suffocated by the phlegm or humour of sin; but if he become his own accuser, while he accuses himself and confesses, he at the same time both ejecteth the sin, and digesteth the whole cause of the disease. Only look diligently to whom thou oughtest to confess thy sin; prove first the physician, to whom thou shouldest set forth the causes of thy sickness, who knoweth how to be weak with the weak, to weep with the weeping, who is trained in sympathy and compassionating, that so thou mayest do and follow whatever counsel he may give, who shall first shew himself a skilful and compassionate physician; if he perceive that thy sickness is such as ought to be published in the congregation of the whole Church, that so others may be edified thereby, and thyself readily cured, this must be prescribed with much deliberation, and on the very experienced advice of such a Physician.”⁵⁵

S. Leo strictly prohibits the publication of the sins privately confessed, upon which some Italian Bishops⁵⁶ had ventured, as a presumption against the “*Apostolic rule*” which, he says, “I have lately *learnt* to be committed by *some* by a lawless usurpation.”

“For it suffices that the guilt of the conscience be laid open to the priests alone in secret confession. For although that fulness of faith, which out of the fear of God fears not to take shame before men, seems to be praiseworthy, yet because the sins of all are not of such sort, that they who ask to do penitence, fear not their being published, let so unadvisable a custom be done away, lest many be kept from the remedies of penitence; either being ashamed, or fearing that actions, for which they may be punished by the laws, should be discovered to their enemies. For that confession suffices, which is made first to God, then to the priest also, who draweth near to pray for the sins of the penitents. For so at length may more be stirred up to penitence, if the sins confessed by the penitents (*poenitentia confitentis*) be not published in the ears of the people.”⁵⁷

S. Ambrose followed the same rule. Paulinus says in his life,⁵⁸ “He was one who rejoiced with those who rejoiced, and wept with those who wept. For as often as any confessed to him his faults, in order to receive penance, he so wept as to compel him too to weep; for he seemed himself to lie prostrate with him who was prostrate. But the matter of the crimes, which he [the penitent] confessed to him, he spake of to no one, except to the Lord Himself, with Whom he interceded, leaving a good example to succeeding Bishops, that they should rather be intercessors with God, than accusers among men.”

In the Eastern Churches, the Bishops seem to have made over this office to Public Penitentiaries. For, when on occasion of a terrible scandal at Constantinople, the office was abolished formally by Nectarius, the Patriarch, A.D. 381—397, “almost all the Bishops everywhere [i. e. in the East] followed him” [i. e. in abolishing their own]. They had them then previously. But to these Penitentiaries sinners confessed privately. “It seemed naturally, from the first, to the Bishops a burdensome thing, that they [the penitents] should confess their sins as in a theatre, having the people as witnesses; they

⁵⁵ Auct. Hom. 2. in Ps. 37, 6. Latin, in Orig. Opp. ii. 688. de la Rue.

⁵⁶ Bishops in Campania, Samnium and Picenum.

⁵⁷ Ep. 168. (al. 136.) ad Episc. Camp. &c. 1, 2.

⁵⁸ Vita S. Ambros. à Paulino &c n. 39. App. Opp. S. Ambr. T. ii. p. x. Ben.

appointed then a presbyter, of excellent life, taciturn and prudent, for this office. To him sinners came and confessed their past lives; but he, according to the sin of each, having put on each the penance, which he ought to perform or undergo, absolved them, when they had fulfilled the penance on themselves. The Novatians, who make no account of penitence, had no need of this. But in the other heresies this prevails till now.”⁵⁹

The act of Nectarius, and the others who followed him, abolished public confession in the Greek Church. For there was no one entitled to assign it. One Eudsemon advised Nectarius to “take away the presbyter over penitence, and to allow that each should, according to his own conscience, partake of the mysteries; for that thus only would the Church be without rebuke.” Private confession remained as before; only, it was, as with us, left to the conscience of each. Socrates, who accounted the abolition injurious to the Church, thought the evil to consist in this, “I see that it has given a plea, not to reprove the sins of each other, nor to keep the Apostle’s command, ‘Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.’”⁶⁰ Discipline was begun to be relaxed, before this change was made. “Antiquity and the gravity and the carefulness thereto belonging had gradually begun to slip through to an indifferent and negligent way of life. For before, I think, sins were lesser, both through the shame of those who told their offences, and through the carefulness of those appointed to this office.”

The difference of the ancient and modern confession does not consist in the confession being public or private, (for that of old was private, before it was public), but that the sins, then confessed, were for the most part,⁶¹ those great deadly sins which bring death to the soul in one act; in the later Church, not of necessity but as expedient, lesser sins have been ordinarily confessed also.

In the Roman Communion, since the “*Omnis utriusque sexus*” of the ivth Lateran Council A. D. 1215, confession, once in the year, has been required of all its members, under pain of excommunication in life, and unhallowed burial after death.

But before going further, it may be well to remove a confusion, to which I myself seem to have given occasion by some words of mine, that⁶² “so long as those words of our Lord, ‘Whose sins thou dost forgive, they are forgiven,’ are repeated over us when ordained, so long will there be confession in the Church of England.” I certainly wrote those words in the full conviction, that any removal of those words was impossible. It did not even occur to me to think of the position of things, if (*per impossibile*) they should be removed.

The writer, who quotes my words, evidently thinks that, if those words could be removed, the practice of confession, which he hates, would cease also. In a laboured article, he tries to prepare for the removal of those words, as one of “two things in the book of Common Prayer which vex the Church of England.”⁶³ [I certainly had not heard, that any one in the Church of *England* had been vexed by them; nor can I imagine how any one, whom they could “vex,” should have presented himself as a candidate for the

⁵⁹ Soz. vii. 16.

⁶⁰ Socr. v. 19.

⁶¹ S. Basil’s monks confessed lesser infirmities, for edification. S. Basil Sermo ascet. T. ii. p. 323. Ben. Reg. fus. tract, q. 26. T. ii. p. 373.

⁶² Letter to *The Times*. Nov. 29th 1866.

⁶³ Quarterly Review No. 288. Oct. 1877. p. 539.

Office of the Priesthood, when, in the solemn act of conferring those orders upon him, they would be recited over him. What does “vex” minds in “the Church of England” is not those words in the Ordinal, but the intolerance of those, who will not allow their neighbours to confess in peace, because they do not wish to confess themselves. But the use of the words in the Ordinal has nothing to do with confession. Priests confess to each other, or laity whose hearts God has touched confess to the Priest, not on account of any words in the Ordinal, but because they *are* Priests, and to Priests our Lord has committed this ministry.] However in preparation for this removal which he wishes for, the writer (whether he himself is concerned with it or no, or is only throwing a firebrand among us) insists that, although our Lord’s words, ‘Whose sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them &c.’ occur in a Bangor Pontifical A.D. 1270, they do not occur as part of the act of ordination in any Ordinal but our own.⁶⁴ In the Exeter Pontifical in Bp. Lacy’s time the persons ordained are called ‘ordinati,’ after the Words had been said to them,⁶⁵ ‘Receive power to offer sacrifice to God, and to celebrate masses both for quick and dead’ and the words quoted in our Ordinal,⁶⁶ ‘Receive the Holy Ghost; Whose sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them, and whose sins ye do retain they are retained,’ are used subsequently, in the course of the same office. Of course, it is no essential change, that the words by which our Lord bestowed the power of remitting sins on the Apostles as a body, should, when addressed to each individual ordained, stand in the singular. It is but the individualising of our Lord’s words to each who is ordained Priest, conveying to *him* that authority, which our Lord gave in common to all, and to each in his order and grace.

The pronouncing of the solemn words at a later stage, yet in the course of the service, is obviously no precedent for omitting them altogether and leaving the service for the Ordination of priests without any indication of any office whatever conferred on the priest, or marking whether the priest in any way differs from the deacon. Those who urge this are generally too busy with their objections, to look far beyond. As usual, they content themselves with negations. They hint at the omission of the words without troubling themselves how they are to be replaced. They do not even except against the words used, since the words *do* specify an office, which our Lord gave to the Apostles and to the Church in them, and the Church has ever believed that the office was conferred on the Priest as well as the Bishop. They only allege, that they are not *necessary*. We could not ‘say that the words in our Ordinal are *necessary*, because, in the Ordination of priests they were at one time not used in Ordinals of unquestioned authority. But in the Consecration of Bishops, the use of the words is of very high antiquity,⁶⁷ and they refer

⁶⁴ *Ib.* p. 552.

⁶⁵ Accipe potestatem offerre sacrificium Deo, missasque celebrare tarn pro vivis quam pro defunctis, in *Nomine Domini. Lib. Pontif. of E. Lacy, Bp. of Exeter*, printed from a MS. of the xivth century, in the Library of the Dean and Chapter, by R. Barnes Esq. A.D. 1847. p. 90.

⁶⁶ Accipe Spiritum sanctum: quorum remisieritis peccata, remittuntur eis, et quorum retinueris [sic], retenta erunt. *Ib.* p. 91.

⁶⁷ The *substance* of the Apostolic Constitutions is very old, far older than the clumsy setting, in which they have been ascribed to Apostles. [See Dr. Pusey’s remarks upon them in the *Doctrine of the Real Presence* pp. 605—609.] The chapter on the prayer for the consecration of a Bishop runs, ‘Grant unto him, Almighty Lord, through Thy Christ, the participation of the Holy Spirit, so that he should have power to remit sins according to Thy commandment, to give Clergy according to Thy injunction, and to loose every bond according to the power which Thou gavest to the Apostles,’ (Const. Ap. viii. 5.) where the remission of sins and the loosing every bond are marked as distinct offices. Mr. Churton quotes from Denzinger, *Ritus Orient.* ii. 6. “in the rites of the *Alexandrian Jacobites*, in the consecration of a Patriarch or Archbishop, the

not to Church censures, but to the forgiveness of sins. But the power of pronouncing God's forgiveness, "by His authority committed to" us, is the same in the Priest as in the Bishop. The Bishop may restrain the use of it; but, unless restrained, the power which he confers on us, is the same as his own.

But the power, contained in those words, does not depend upon the words being addressed to the priests, so long as there are any priests at all. They are our Lord's words to the Apostles, and in them to their successors, which confer the power; the power does not depend on any use of them in the Ordination of priests. The Greek priests have the same power, or any others ordained by any other ritual, so that they are validly ordained. The omission of the words which, this writer avows, "are retained with the utmost propriety by the Presbyterian Church in ordaining her presbyters, because it holds that they are really Bishops," would shake people's minds through and through, as implying an heretical bias, if not a formal rejection of the truth contained in them. No one would imagine that this hint at their removal proceeds from a mere love of antiquity. Our English Ordinal stood in the way of the Irish innovations. The arguments which were supposed to lie against the Absolution in the Service for the Visitation of the sick, which

prayer, 'Give him the power of Thy Holy Spirit, that he may loose all the bonds of those whom the enemy has bound in sin, and grant that he may reconcile separated members to the unity of the Church.' The like prayer occurs in the rites of the *Syrian Jacobites*, 'that the newly ordained Bishop may obtain entire remission of guilt sins and faults for the whole spiritual and sacerdotal flock committed to him,' and, as distinct offices, 'that he may bind and loose, expel and separate.'" (Ib. p. 97.) In the rite of the *Maronites* for the ordination of a Bishop we also find the prayer, 'Give unto him the joy of Thy Holy Spirit, that he may have the power of remitting sins according to Thy word, and may loosen bonds according to the power which Thou gavest to Thine Apostles. (Ib. p. 199). "Again in the *Nestorian rites* we have the antiphon, 'I give unto thee the keys of the spiritual treasure, that thou mayest bind and loose whatsoever is in heaven and earth.'" "The prayer in the Latin rites for consecrating a Bishop is not more precise. 'Let whatsoever he binds on earth be bound in heaven and whatsoever he shall loose on earth be loosed in heaven: whosoever sins he retains, do Thou retain them; and whosoever sins he remits, do Thou remit them.'" Defence of the English Ordinal, pp. 58-61.

But since the office of the Bishop and the Priest is so far one, he says, "we find in the rites of the Armenians at the ceremony of investing the Presbyter with the girdle, the form 'Receive from the Holy Ghost the power of binding and loosing, which our Lord Jesus Christ gave to the holy Apostles. Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall he bound in heaven, and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.' (Denzinger Ritus Orient, ii. 313.)" The words are also used in a precatory form, "Give him grace, as Thou gavest to the holy Apostles, that whatsoever he shall bind on earth &c" (Ibid. p. 316.) The rites of the *Syrian Jacobites* (Ibid. p. 101.) contain a charge addressed by the Bishop to those about to be ordained Priests. 'He who receives a great power committed to him is bound to great purity. Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven. Such a ministry is not committed to the celestial powers, because they are "ministering spirits." That which is committed to you is the Priesthood, which, though exercised on earth, has its rank and power over the body of Christ and the souls of Christians. The judges of this world have power to bind, but they can only bind the bodies of men; but the bonds of priests bind their souls and extend even to heaven: for whatsoever they bind here below, God confirms above. For He said, 'Whose sins ye remit, they shall be remitted.' In the rites of the *Maronites* (Ibid ii. p. 143) we find a prayer for the new Presbyter, which recognizes this power, "Grant that he may be a vigilant and diligent steward, to whom the keys of heaven are by Thee committed, that he may open the doors of repentance to those who shall be converted unto Thee; a steward, who carries the mysteries of the Priesthood of the Lord's treasures, who, at Thy command, may bind the guilty, and by Thy authority may loose the penitents who shall come to true repentance." (Ibid. p. 12.) In the rites of the *Jacobite Alexandrian* (Ibid. p.14.) Church, there is a similar prayer, that the Presbyter may "fulfil the functions of the Priesthood to those of the people who shall, as they ought, confess their misery to him, and this is followed by a spiritual charge and admonition on the subject of hearing confessions." Churton 1. c. pp. 61 -63.

the Irish (so-termed) 'Synod' has abolished, were just as effective or worthless, as the case may be, when applied to the Ordinal. But it is understood that, in approaching the Ordinal, the innovators were arrested by the reflection, that a change in the form of Ordination might raise legal questions which would imperil the chance of young men ordained in Ireland, and having hopes of obtaining English preferment. The words were accordingly retained; although, it seems, they do "vex" some of those who profess to accept them. The words *do* express faith, and that, relating to an article of the Apostles' Creed, "the Forgiveness of sins." It may be difficult to say what degree of omission involves formal heresy. No one could doubt that a body, which, in the face of the experience of centuries, were to omit from the Nicene Creed the words, "of One Substance with the Father" would be heretical to the core, even though it inserted no formal words of heresy. A Socinian prayer-book has, ere now, been formed by omissions. To fail to confess our Lord before men is one form of denying Him, and "whosoever shall deny Me before men," our Lord says, "him will I also deny before My Father which is in heaven."

The removal of the words would not obtain the advocates of their removal anything which they wish, unless it were what they seem to desire above all things, the removal of ourselves. It would occasion probably a lasting schism, or rend from the Church of England very many of her most attached members; but it would not in the least abate the use of confession among those who remained. Confession is part of the life-blood of the Church. Consciences are stirred; and unless the Church of England were to renounce the faith and formally deny our Blessed Lord's words, a penitent who has learned to believe them, would, by virtue of them, seek from the priest, whom our Lord commissioned, the exercise of the office entrusted to him. They would seek it of him, if not, as of old many did, elsewhere. Conscience is part of our engraced nature. Much more then will that be true, which the Roman poet said of unregenerate nature, 'Expel nature with a pitch-fork, yet it will always come back.' Well, if some would learn at least from Horace, if not from the Gospel, and desist in time from 'pitch-fork' measures!

However, my object here is to distinguish between different grounds for quoting our Lord's words in the following extracts: 1) in answer to Roman controversialists, in proof that our Church did retain the doctrine of confession and absolution; and this was proved by their use in our Ordinal. 2) As the ground of our Absolutions; and this depends on our Blessed Lord's words, as they lie in the Gospel, which are, any how, the Divine authority for Absolution. The use of His words in our Ordinal has been a continual reminder to us of the power, which we received at our Ordination for the benefit of His people. But we believe that we have this power, not because our Church incorporated them in our Ordination Service, but because our Lord spake them, and the Church has always from the beginning understood them to convey that power.

It would be wearisome to go through a mere list of names of individual writers who recognized confession, as belonging to the English Church. I will then place them as they did so, partly in controversy with Roman writers, partly in reference to our formularies as an existing system. I should have been glad to have divided them further, as the authors wrote as Theologians, or acted upon the minds of the people by Sermons, or by manuals of devotion; but I feared that this would introduce confusion, since the game Divines would come under different classes. I have thought it better then to place them in one class, although miscellaneous.

It is remarkable, that not a little vindication of confession among us was in defence against Roman controversialists. Our writers, *then*, in self-defence, had to allege that, although we left confession free to the conscience of each, we did not disuse or discountenance it. Our controversialists of that day had to claim for our Church, that it *retained*, that which the Puritan controversialists of this day declaim against us, as though we were *introducing* it. They of old *vindicated* as at least not alien from our Church, what Puritan writers now denounce as alien to its “doctrine, principles and order.”

I will set down a few of them, premising that they come not from one section of the Church. Bp. Jewel, Bp. White, and Abp. Ussher speak distinctly as well as Bp. Overall, Bp. Morton, and Abp. Bramhall.

I. 1. BISHOP JEWEL says,⁶⁸

“Abuses and errors removed, specially the priest being learned, as we have said before, we mislike no manner of confession, whether it be private or public. For as we think it not unlawful to make open confession before many, so we think it not unlawful (abuses always excepted) to make the like confession in private, either before a few, or before one alone.” ““The difference that is between us and our adversaries in the whole matter is not great: saving that it liketh Mr. Harding to busy himself with needless quarrels without cause. Three kinds of confession are expressed unto us in the Scriptures. The first made secretly unto God alone: the second openly before the whole congregation: the third privately unto our brother. Of the two former kinds there is no question. Touching the third, if it be discreetly used, to the greater comfort and better satisfaction of the penitent, without superstition or other ill, it is not in any wise by us reprov'd. The abuses and error set apart, we do no more mislike a ‘private confession’ than a ‘private sermon.’ Thus much only we say, that ‘private confession’ to be made unto the minister, is neither commanded by Christ, nor necessary to salvation.”⁶⁹

2. BISHOP OVERALL asserts that the only difference between the Church of England and Rome in this respect, is that we do not hold “Sacramental Confession and Absolution” to and from a Priest to be “absolutely necessary” to the remission of sins.

“The Church of England, howsoever it holdeth not confession and absolution sacramental, that is made unto and received from a priest, to be so absolutely necessary, as that without it there can be no remission of sins; yet by this place it is manifest, what she teacheth concerning the virtue and force of this sacred action. The confession is commanded to be special; the absolution is the same that the ancient Church and the present Church of Rome useth; what would they have more? Our *if he feel his conscience troubled*, is no more than is *si inveniat peccata*: for if he be not troubled with sin, what needs either confession or absolution? Venial sins, that separate not from grace of God, need not so much trouble a man’s conscience. If he hath committed any mortal sin, then we require confession of it to a priest, who may give him, upon his true contrition and repentance, the benefit of absolution; which takes effect according to his disposition that is absolved.... The truth is, that in the priest’s absolution there is the true power and virtue

⁶⁸ Defence of Apology ii. vi. 1. T. iv. p. 486. ed. Jelf,

⁶⁹ Def. of Apol. ii. vii. 2. p. 562.

of forgiveness, which will most certainly take effect, nisi ponitur obex, as in baptism.”⁷⁰

3. ARCHBISHOP USSHER, of the Calvinistic school, so long commonly quoted as “the learned Ussher,” in answer to “the Jesuit’s challenge,”⁷¹ “how can your religion be true, which disalloweth of many chief articles, which the Saints and Fathers of that primitive Church did generally hold to be true?” and as one of these, “that the Doctors Pastors and Fathers of that Church exhorted the people to confess their sins unto their ghostly Fathers,” treats it as a calumny, which ought itself to be confessed, before the Jesuit was absolved;

“We tell him again, that by the public order prescribed in our Church, before the administration of the Holy Communion, the minister likewise doth exhort the people, that if there be any of them, which cannot quiet his own conscience, but requireth further comfort or counsel, he should ‘come to him, or some other discreet and learned minister of God’s word, and open his griefs, that he may receive such ghostly counsel advice and comfort as his conscience may be relieved; and that by the ministry of God’s Word he may receive comfort and the benefit of absolution, to the quieting of his conscience and avoiding of all scruple and doubtfulness.’ Whereby it appeareth, that the exhorting of the people to confess their sins unto their ghostly fathers maketh no such wall of separation betwixt the ancient Doctors and us, but we may well, for all this, be of the same religion that they were of, and consequently that this doughty champion hath more will than skill to manage controversies, who could make no wiser choice of points of differences to be insisted upon. Be it therefore known unto him, that no kind of Confession, either public or private, is disallowed by us, that is in any way requisite for the due execution of that ancient power of the Keys which Christ bestowed upon His Church.”⁷²

“From Confession we are now to proceed unto Absolution, which it were pity this man should receive, before he made confession of the open wrong he hath here done, in charging us to deny ‘that priests have power to forgive sins.’ Whereas the very formal words which our Church requireth to be used in the ordination of a minister, are these: ‘Whose sins thou dost forgive, they are forgiven; and whose sins thou dost retain, they are retained.’ And therefore, if this be all the matter, the Fathers and we shall agree well enough, however this make-bate would fain put friends together by the ears, where there is no occasion at all of quarrel. For we acknowledge most willingly? that the principal part of the priest’s ministry is exercised in the matter of ‘forgiveness of sins;’ question only is of the manner, how this part of their function is executed by them, and of the bounds and limits thereof.”⁷³

“To forgive sins, therefore, being thus proper to God only and to His Christ, His ministers must not be held to have this power communicated unto them, but in an improper sense, namely, because God forgiveth by them, and hath appointed them, both to apply those means by which He useth to forgive sins, and to give notice unto repentant sinners of that forgiveness. For ‘who can forgive sins but God alone?’ ‘Yet doth He

⁷⁰ A Ms. note on the Absolution in the Office for the Visitation of the Sick, by Bishop Overall, written in an interleaved Common Prayer Book in Bishop Cosin’s Library, printed in the year 1618, and taken from “Tracts of the Anglican Fathers.”

⁷¹ Answer to a Jesuit p. 1.

⁷² *Ib.* i. c. iv. Confession pp. 74, 75. ed. Cambr.

⁷³ *Id.* *Ib.* Of the priest’s power to forgive sins. *Ib.* pp. 99,100.

forgive by them also, unto whom He hath given power to forgive,' saith S. Ambrose and his followers."⁷⁴

4. DR CRAKANTHORP, once an esteemed controversialist in the Church of England, protests that private Confession is the teaching of our Church, and declares the statement, that it had been "abrogated among us, to be an artifice and deceit."

"As to auricular confession being abrogated among us, thou dealest artfully and deceitfully. Private confession, whereby any disburdens into the bosom, or, if thou wiliest, the ear of the Priest, the anguish of his mind for one or More sins committed; the absolution, moreover of such Sinner, after an earnest and unfeigned repentance done by him, through the keys of the Church committed to all presbyters, our Church both teaches and approves."—"We have not abolished private confession, nor private absolution."⁷⁵

5. BISHOP WHITE vindicates its use as consonant to Holy Scripture and the practice of the Primitive Church.

"The Protestants in their doctrine acknowledge, that private confession of sins made by penitent people to the pastors of their souls, and particular absolution, or special application of the promises of the Gospel to such as be penitent, are profitable helps of virtue, godliness, and spiritual comfort."⁷⁶ "The true ends of private confession are these, which follow. *First*, to inform, instruct, and counsel Christian people in their particular actions. *Secondly*, if they be delinquents, to reprove them, and make them understand the danger of their sin. *Thirdly*, to comfort those that are afflicted and truly penitent, and to assure them of remission of sins by the word of absolution. *Fourthly*, to prepare people to the worthy reception of the Holy Communion. And if private confession be referred and used to these ends, it is a work of godly discipline, consonant to Holy Scripture, and anciently practised by the primitive Church."⁷⁷

G. BISHOP MONTAGUE says that, under different circumstances, our Church urges, persuades, requires it.

"It is confessed, that priests, and none but priests, have power to forgive sins: it is confessed, that private confession unto a priest is of very ancient practice in the Church, of excellent use and practice, being discreetly handled. We refuse it to none, if men require it, if need be to have it. We urge it and persuade it in extremes. We require it in case of perplexity, for the quieting of men disturbed, and their consciences. It hath been so acknowledged by your followers, that, in the visitation of the sick, it is required: and likewise before receiving of the Lord's Supper."⁷⁸

7. DR. GEORGE HAKEWIL makes a distinction between judicial and declaratory absolution, in the way in which people accept or reject the same form of words, according to the *sense* which they attach to it. He denies it to be judicial, only because

⁷⁴ *Ib.* p. 108.

⁷⁵ *Defensio Eccles. Ang. contra Archiepisc. Spalat. cap. lxxx. § 6. p. 555. Ang. Cath.*

⁷⁶ *Answer to Fisher, p. 186.*

⁷⁷ *Ib.* p. 188.

⁷⁸ "A Gagge for the new Gospel?" p. 83.

judgment ultimately belongs to Almighty God. As S. Cyprian says,⁷⁹ “We do not anticipate the judgment of the Lord Who will come to judge, but that, if He find a sinner’s penitence full and entire, He will then ratify what has been here determined by us.”

“We willingly acknowledge (with S. Paul) that to the ministers of the Gospel is committed the ministry of reconciliation, and the keys of the kingdom of heaven, to open and shut, as they see cause: and therefore in our Ordination hath our Church ordained the Bishop to use these words, *Receive the Holy Ghost: whose sins thou dost forgive they are forgiven, and whose sins thou dost retain they are retained*; and consequently if the power of absolution be given in these words, then is it given and received in the Church of England, and as for the people, they stand bound, as often as they meet in their solemn assemblies, to a public and general confession, howbeit they are indeed freed from the necessity of that which we call auricular, though not from the *possibility*, as you falsely pretend. For as we enforce none, if they come not, as knowing that force may work upon the body, but never upon the will; so we exclude none, if they come with a true penitent heart, or out of the scruple of conscience, either to seek counsel, being ignorant of the quality and quantity of their sin; or comfort against despair for sin known and acknowledged. In this case, the only imparting of a man’s mind to a trusty friend, like the opening of a festered sore, cannot but bring content to a soul so anguished and perplexed; but much more, if the ulcer be disclosed to a skilful and faithful pastor of the soul, who is no less able than willing, as well to understand the nature of the disease, as by warrant of divine ordinance to apply the remedy. And sure I see not but, the minister standing in the place of God, as His ambassador, and pronouncing absolution, upon humble and hearty repentance, as from God, it should prove a marvellous great ease and settlement to a poor distracted and distressed conscience: in which regard our Church hath well ordained in one of the exhortations before the Communion, ‘If any of the congregation be troubled with the burden of sin, so that he cannot quiet &c.’; and in the Visitation of the Sick, ‘if he feel his conscience troubled with any weighty matter,’ he is willed to make a special confession, and the minister thereupon to absolve him ‘in the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost;’ which is an absolution only declaratory, conditional, and ministerial. But the Church of Rome, not content herewith, challengeth to herself herein a power judicial, which is in truth individually annexed to the person and office of Him Who is Judge both of quick and dead.”⁸⁰

8. ARCHDEACON MASON was an early and well-known defender of English orders against Roman controversialists. The title of his work gives a list of fifteen Roman controversialists whom he was answering. In the chapter “on the power of absolving,” he explains in what sense absolution by the Priest may be said to be “judicial,” and affirms that we use private absolution, whenever the case requires it.

“Since sin alone severs God and man, the remission of sins is nothing else than the reconciliation of God and man, which in Holy Scripture is ascribed both to God and the ministers of God, but in different ways, as the Apostle says; *All things are of God, Who hath reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation, because God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not*

⁷⁹ Ep. 55. ad Antonian. n. 15. p. 136. Oxf. Tr.

⁸⁰ Answer to a treatise written by Dr. Carrier by way of letter to His Majestie &c. pp. 266, 267.

imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ; as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. God then reconciles us as Lord, by His own authority; the minister as ambassador, by vicarious authority: God, by not imputing sins, the minister by ministering.⁸¹

“When Christ said, *Whose sins ye remit, they are remitted*, He conferred on His ministers the power of remitting sins;—but whose? Certainly of those only, who repent and believe.—Sin is committed against God, and so is remitted by God only. Wherefore when the minister remits sins to him who believeth, this remission is nothing else than a declaration, whereby he shews that God hath forgiven.⁸²

“Nor have we only public Absolution in our Churches, but also private. For there are some who want a singular consolation, and accordingly we use private absolution in the visitation of the sick, and as often as the broken spirits and wounded consciences of individuals require this. For after the sick man has made a profession of faith and charity, if he feels his conscience weighed down in anything, he unloads it privately into the bosom of the minister, and when he has made the confession, the minister uses this form of absolution (the form in the Visitation of the Sick).

“Thus we uplift tender consciences, struggling with the weight of sin and despair, by the hope of pardon through the promises of the Gospel, and when they repent and believe, we pronounce that their sins are forgiven.”⁸³

And in answer to the question, “Is this Absolution declaratory only, and not also judicial?” he says, “It is judicial also. The Apology of the Eng. Church (Jewel) acknowledges that the Priest is a judge. But judgement is required not only of discretion, but also of authority and power, which the Lord has vouchsafed to confer on His ministers.”

He supposed himself to be again asked,

“In judgement two things concur, the cognizance of the cause and the pronouncing of the sentence. Are these found with you?” He answers,

“Certainly: for the persons to be absolved openly profess their faith and repentance: this is the cognizance of the cause; then the Minister declares and seals to him the forgiveness of his sins: this is the pronouncing of the sentence.”

He supposes it again objected to him, “If the minister absolves as a judge, then he does it *properly*; not therefore by *declaring* it: for declaration is of a herald, not of a judge.” He answers, “Judges are of two sorts, superior and inferior: the superior judge, i. e. the king, can, properly and by his own royal authority, remit offences against his own laws and absolve the guilty. Not so the inferior judge, since he has to bring everything to the rule of law. But if the king grants to the inferior judge the power of absolving all those, in whom he shall find indications of true sorrow or penitence, this absolution will be nothing else than a declaration, whereby he pronounces that this or that man has obtained pardon from the prince. In the game way, God, as Supreme Judge, remits properly and of His own power: the minister, as an inferior judge, only by declaring and

⁸¹ *Vindiciæ Eccl. Angl. v. 10. 5.* Not having Lindsay's translation of Mason's Latin enlargement of his work, which was originally in English, I have translated it.

⁸² *Ib. n. 8.*

⁸³ *Ib. n. 9.*

announcing the judgement and sentence of the Eternal Judge.”⁸⁴

9. DR. JOHN WHITE must have been a writer of authority in his day, since he is quoted as such by Dean Boys,⁸⁵ Bp. Andrewes and Bp. Cosin.⁸⁶ Writing on confession against the Roman practice and in defence of ours, he says,

“This answer being made to the Popish shrift, for the removing of the general, absolute, and perpetual necessity thereof, which the Papists urge: we are to add concerning the point the doctrine of our Church, which doth not deny or take away the free and godly use of confession, but teacheth that *it is very profitable* when it is discreetly done upon just occasion, and a godly, learned and trusty minister may be had for the searching of the wounds of sinful souls and applying of fit counsel and comfort to distressed consciences; and therefore our Church *exhorteth*, when any cannot so well by himself apply the means prescribed in the word, to himself for the quieting of his conscience, but requires further counsel or comfort therein, then to resort to some discreet and learned minister of God’s word, and to open his grief, as it is in the second exhortation, before the Communion. For which purpose also a form of absolution is prescribed in the visitation of the sick, to be used after special confession, in sickness as well of mind as of body.”⁸⁷

10. BISHOP MORTON, like Overall, says, that the only question between us and Rome is as to the “absolute necessity of private confession” to salvation.

“It is not questioned between us (as their own Cardinal witnesseth) whether it be convenient for a man burthened with sin to lay open his conscience in private unto the minister of God, and to seek at his hands both the counsel of instruction and the comforts of God’s pardon: but whether there be (as from Christ’s institution) such an absolute necessity of this private confession, as that without it there can be no remission or pardon hoped for from God.”⁸⁸ “The power of absolution, whether it be general or particular, whether in public or in private, it is professed in our Church: where both in her public service is proclaimed pardon and absolution upon all penitents, and a private applying of absolution unto particular penitents by the office of the minister; and greater power than this no man hath received from God.”⁸⁹

11. DR. PETER HEYLYN explains in like way the doctrine of our Church, in contrast with Rome and the Puritans, asserts private confession to be agreeable to the Church of England, while admitting—not that it was not in use—but not so much as ought to be.

“The main point in dispute is touching the confession of our sins to men, and the authority of sacerdotal absolution. First, for confession to be made to the priest or minister, it is agreeable both to the doctrine and intent of the Church of England, though not so much in practice as it ought to be.”⁹⁰

⁸⁴ Vindiciæ. n. 10.

⁸⁵ Below.

⁸⁶ Bp. Andrewes Minor Works p. 155, Ang. Cath. Lib.

⁸⁷ Way to the true Church § 40, p. 231. ed. 1610.

⁸⁸ Morton, Catholike Appeale, A.D. 1609. p. 253.

⁸⁹ Ib. p. 270.

⁹⁰ Theol. Vet. p. 485.

“What then? Is there no difference in this point between Home and us? Assuredly, especially as to the necessity and particularity. For those of Rome impose an absolute necessity of this sacramental confession.⁹¹ “Now as we disagree with those of the Church of Rome about the nature and necessity of private confession, so we have no less difference with the grandees of the Puritan faction.” “The Church hath taught us, that absolution is [not only declarative, but] authoritative and judicial too. Authoritative, not by a proper, natural, and original power; for so the absolving of a sinner appertains unto God alone; but by a delegated and derived power, Communicated to the Priest in that clause of their commission, *whose sins soever ye remit, they are remitted; and whose sins soever ye retain, they are retained*. Which proves the Priest to have a *power of remitting sins*, and that in as express and ample manner, as he can receive it. But though it be a delegated ministerial power, yet doth not the descent thereof from Almighty God prove it to be the less judicial. Then Judges, and other ministers of justice sitting on the Bench, may be said to exercise a judicial power on the lives and fortunes of the subjects; because they do it by virtue of the king’s commission, not out of any *sovereign power* which they challenge to themselves in their several circuits.⁹²

“The sacerdotal power of forgiving sins is a derived or delegated ministerial power: but it is judicial also, not declarative only.—No man, not in priestly order, can absolve from sin,—because he wants the power of order, to which the promise is annexed by our Saviour Christ, which makes the sentence of the priest to be so judicial: which, when the penitent doth hear from the mouth of the Minister, he need not doubt, in *foro conscientiae*, but that his sins be as verily forgiven on earth, as if he had heard Christ Himself, *in foro judicii*, pronouncing them with His own mouth to be forgiven in Heaven.”⁹³

12. ARCHBISHOP BRAMHALL makes the same distinction between the power of God and the conditional authority, which He delegates to man, but declares that a little shame before our fellow-servant may prevent the great shame on the Day of Judgement.

“We do acknowledge that, in Penitence, pastors of the Church have a dependent ministerial power of loosing from sin; but that the primitive imperial original power is God’s. God’s power is absolute; man’s power is only conditional, to loose a man, if he be contrite and aptly disposed.”⁹⁴

“We acknowledge, that he who is ordained, is enabled by his office many ways to put away sins: .. 5. By special absolution. The Priest absolves; or to say more properly, God absolves by the Priest. ‘Whose sins ye remit they are remitted.’⁹⁵ “Protestants condemn not private confession and absolution itself, as an ecclesiastical policy, to make men more wary how they offend; so as it might be left free, without tyrannical imposition. By a little shame, which we suffer before our fellow-servant, we prevent that great confusion of face, which otherwise must fall upon impenitent sinners at the Day of Judgement.”⁹⁶

⁹¹ Ib. p. 487.

⁹² Ib. p.488.

⁹³ Theol. Vet. p. 489.

⁹⁴ Of Protestants’ Ordination P. iv. Disc. vi. Works v. 190.

⁹⁵ Ib. p. 213.

⁹⁶ Ib. p. 222.

13. ARCHBISHOP WAKE, regretting the non-observance of public discipline, insists that our Church exhorts to confession especially before Holy Communion and in sickness, but in that he says “especially,” he does not limit it to those occasions. In regard to the confession of the sick, a grave writer, like Archbishop Wake, could never have said ‘we never fail to exhort them’ unless it had been the habitual practice. Else it had been a lie.

“For Penance and Confession we wish our Discipline were both more strictly required, and more duly observed than it is. The Canons of our Church do perhaps require as much as the primitive Christians themselves did; and it is more the *decay of piety* in the people, than any Want of care in her, that they are not as well and regularly practised.”⁹⁷

“The Church of England refuses no sort of confession, either public or private, which may be any way necessary to the quieting of men’s consciences, or to the exercising of that power of binding and loosing, which our Saviour Christ has left to His Church. We have our penitential canons for public offenders; we exhort men, if they have any the least doubt or scruple, nay sometimes though they have none, but especially before they receive the holy Sacrament, to confess their sins. We propose to them the benefit not only of ghostly advice, how to manage their repentance, but the great comfort of Absolution too, as soon as they shall have completed it.—When we visit our sick, we *never fail* to exhort them to make a special confession of their sins to him that ministers to them: and when they have done it, the absolution is so full, that the Church of Rome itself could not desire to add anything to it.”⁹⁸

14. I will add, for the greatness of his name, one of the last century, BISHOP BERKELEY, writing to one, inclined to join the Roman Communion.

“I had forgot to say a word of confession, which you mention as an advantage in the Church of Rome, which is not to be had in ours. But it may be had in our communion by any who please to have it; and, I admit it, may be very usefully practised.”⁹⁹

II. The meaning of our formularies is so plain, that those who write upon them cannot but acknowledge it. It remains for them only more or less to point it. Thus,

1. BP. SPARROW, who was one of the Commissioners at the Savoy Conference, has on the rubric, “if he feels his conscience troubled with any weighty matter,” the memorable words,” it should be considered whether every deadly sin be not a weighty matter.”¹⁰⁰

He writes more fully in a celebrated Sermon,¹⁰¹ which he preached before the University of Cambridge, A. D. 1637 on “Confession of sins and the power of Absolution.” He sums up what he had said on the nature of Confession, “Where is a

⁹⁷ Exposition of the doctrine of the Church of England, Art. xi. p. 40. It was inserted in Bp. Gibson’s preservative against Popery T. iii. p. 36.

⁹⁸ *Ib.* p. 42.

⁹⁹ Letter to Sir John James, 1741. Berkeley’s Works, iv. p. 278. Clar. Press.

¹⁰⁰ Rationale on the C. Prayer, p. 212. ed. 7. A. D. 1722.

¹⁰¹ Printed after the Rationale pp. 312, 313.

Confessor all this while? Where is any to take our Confessions?” and, having said that the confession must be “to Him Who hath the power of Absolution,” i. e. God, he subjoins,

“But there is another Confessor, that should not be neglected. *Qui confiteri vult, ut inveniatur gratiam, quaerat Sacerdotem scientem solvere et ligare*, saith S. Augustine: He that would be sure of pardon, let him seek out a Priest, and make his humble confession unto him. For God, Who alone hath the prime original right of forgiving sins, hath delegated the Priests His judges here on earth, and given them the power of Absolution; so that they can, in His Name, forgive the sins of those, that humbly confess unto them. But is not this blasphemy, said the Scribes once? Is it not Popery, say some with us now? Take the counsel that is given in Job, *Enquire of the former generations; ask the fathers, and they shall tell thee*. Ask then S. Chrysostom, and hear what he saith, in his fifth Homily upon these words of Isaiah, *I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne*. ‘What is comparable,’ saith he, ‘to the power of the Priest, to whom Christ hath said, *whatsoever ye shall bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven*? Heaven waits and expects the Priest’s sentence here on earth. For the Priest sits Judge on earth; the Lord follows the servant, and what the servant binds or looses on earth, [clave non errante.]¹⁰² that the Lord confirms in heaven.’ Words so clear for the *judiciary* formal Absolution of the Priest, as nothing can be said more plain.”

“But to put all out of doubt, let us search the Scriptures. Look into the 20th of S. John, *Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them, and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained*. Here is plainly a power of remitting sins granted to the Priest by our Blessed Saviour. Nor can it be understood of remitting sins by preaching, as some expound it, nor by baptising, as others guess. For both these, ‘preach’ and ‘baptise,’ they could do long before; but this power of remitting they received not till now, that is, after His Resurrection. That they could preach and baptise before, is plain; preach they might, they had a licence for it (S. Matt. x. 7.) *As ye go, preach, saying, &c*. And baptise they could, and did, (S. John iv. 2.) *Though Jesus Himself baptised not, but His disciples*. But this power of remission in the text they received not till now, that is, after His Resurrection; as appears, first by the ceremony of Breathing, by that signifying that then He infused that power into them, which He bid them receive: And secondly, by the word ‘Receive,’ which He could not properly have used, if they had been imbued with it before. So then it is not the Power of preaching or baptising, which is here given to the Apostles; but, as the Fathers interpret the place, a peculiar Power of pronouncing, as God’s deputed judges, pardon and remission to the penitent; a Power of absolving from sins, in the Name of God, all such as penitently confess unto them. A Form of which Absolution our holy Mother the Church hath prescribed in the ‘Visitation for the sick.’¹⁰³

2. L’ESTRANGE.

“Here the Church approveth of, though she doth not command, auricular confession. Many times poor souls lie labouring under the pangs of a horrid reflex upon the number or greatness of their sins, and the dreadful wrath of God deservedly expected for them. In this case, no remedy comparable to an humble and sincere confession at large, common to all, and sometimes restrained to some one particular predominant sin,

¹⁰² Bp. Sparrow inserts this, as also he translates freely.

¹⁰³ Sermon l.c. pp. 314, 315.

of whose pressure he finds the greatest weight; upon which confession, mixed with a vehement and earnest plying the throne of God for mercy, it becomes the minister instantly to interpose, to lay before him the inexhaustible treasure of God's infinite mercies, to assure him of his interest therein, and upon the hypothesis of his contrition to be serious and unfeigned, to give him Absolution."¹⁰⁴

3. DR. NICHOLLS.

"It is very plain from this passage that our Church does not condemn private confession and absolution; though she does not universally require them, (as the Church of Rome does,) as being necessary for the pardon of all sins."¹⁰⁵

4. DEAN COMBER not only states simply the meaning of the exhortation in the service for Holy Communion, but expresses a hearty wish, that it were more acted upon.

"With us it [confession] is restored to its Primitive Use, for we direct all men always to confess to God; but some also to confess their faults and reveal their doubts to the Priest, especially in these three cases; (1) When we are disquieted with the guilt of some sin already committed; or (2) when we cannot conquer some lust or passion; or (3) when we are afflicted with any intricate scruples, particularly whether we may now be fit to receive this blessed Sacrament or no. If any of these be our case, then *first*, we must choose prudently, preferring our own Minister, if he be tolerably fitted, or else we may elect another that is prudent and pious, learned and judicious; one who may manage this weighty concern gravely and privately, and dispatch it wisely and fully to our satisfaction. Being thus provided of a guide, *secondly*, Let us deal sincerely, and open our grief to him as fully and impartially as we would do a wound to a skilful Chirurgeon: let not fear or shame stop our mouths—If the conscience be wounded with guilt, he hath power from Christ upon our contrition to give us Absolution—Wherefore I do heartily wish we were more frequent in these applications to our Ministers; it would argue that we were more concerned for a pardon and more sensible of our guilt; nay it would shew we did perfectly hate sin, when we would be content to suffer the shame of discovery, so we might have the benefit of amendment."¹⁰⁶

In his comment on the office 'for the Visitation of the sick' he expresses the same wish that confession were more frequent in health, both for "the better regulation of our lives," and that the minister might be able better to help us when death is at hand.

"We should now proceed to the consolations, but only for fear that any secret sin should hinder the sick from receiving the benefit of them, we first advise him to a special confession, if his conscience accuse him for any great transgression; and this is no more than God requires by His holy apostle S. James; for, after the order for the sick man to send for the elders of the Church to over him, and the promises of recovery and remission he adds, 'Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed: the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much;' whence it appears to be our duty to confess our sins, not only to God, but to men also, especially to the elders of the Church, mentioned in the former verse, and meant here by the title of 'a

¹⁰⁴ The Alliance of Divine Offices, Annot. upon *Confession and Absolution*, p. 448. Ang. Cath. ed.

L'Estrange was a layman.

¹⁰⁵ Commentary on the Book of Common Prayer, on the Exhortation in the Order of the Holy Communion.

¹⁰⁶ Companion to the Altar, on the warning for Holy Communion, pp. 132—134. 1681.

righteous man,' a name properly given to the ministers of God. And this was so received a doctrine in the primitive times, that the confession of sins to a priest, in case of a troubled conscience, was esteemed an Apostolical institution, and was a general practice, as might be proved by innumerable testimonies of holy Rite, but to reduce it to its Primitive institution: we wish, that our people, even in time of health, (when their conscience is troubled for some great sin, or their souls are assaulted with a violent temptation,) would come and make their case known to their Spiritual Physician, to whom the Fathers elegantly compare the priest in this case. For if we blush to shew our wounds to them, we cannot expect they should cure that which they are not suffered to see: and if this were constantly practised in our health, we should not only be rarely assisted in order to the continual regulation of our lives; but when sickness and death comes, the holy man would be better able to assist us, as being no stranger to the state of our souls, and we ourselves should have less work to do when our last conflict comes. But if we have omitted this before, we have more need to send speedily for God's minister in our Sickness, which is the special time, in which S. James enjoins us to confess to the elders of the Church: and of the benefit of this last Confession the thief upon the Cross was a great example, who, confessing his offence, was accepted immediately, not only into Christ's favour, but His Kingdom. And therefore this confession of the sick was enjoined, not only by foreign Councils, but by the ancient Canons of our own Patriarchs, and the Constitutions of our own nations of old. Yea Dion. Carthus. affirms, 'It is the custom of all Christians to confess their sins when they suppose themselves in danger of death.' So that this is so far from being a peculiar practice of the Roman Church, that it was always, and is now an universal Rite, observed not only by the English Protestants, but by the reformed foreign Churches, as is often noted by their historian. And particularly, he remarks, that the famous Brentius before his death, making a private confession of his sins, requested and received Absolution, and was partaker of the holy Sacrament. But besides these examples, we have special reason for the confessing of our sins to the Priest now. *First*, Because our sins usually appear most terrible in the approaches of death, and those offences, that we made light of in time of health, do now lie heavy upon us, and since no confession is so acceptable as that which flows from true contrition, doubtless we are in best temper to confess, when the rod and the grace of God together have made us most sensible of our guilt and danger; and besides, if we smother this grief, it may turn to a dangerous despair, whereas an ingenuous confession will ease our minds and invite our compassionate spiritual Physician to administer proper comforts to us.

... It concerns us to know our state, now, while we rectify that which is amiss, and prevent God's dreadful judgement, of which we should stand in so much dread, as not to dare to trust our own too favourable opinion of ourselves, but unbosom ourselves to him whom God hath appointed to aid us in this weighty matter. Lastly, men ought to confess their sins in sickness, to give sufficient evidence of their repentance. A sick man cannot attest his sincerity by so many proofs as one in health may do. ... The best and almost the only means he hath to testify his unfeigned repentance, is to be willing to offer himself to the shame of discovery, which is an excellent sign he will amend if ever he regain his health, because he shuns not reproof neither seeks concealment; this manifests he is convinced of his fault and sorry for it, that he extremely detests it, and resolves never to commit it more, since he hath unveiled that accursed privacy wherein it seemed to be

securely acted before: nor will a true penitent be hindered from this free confession by the little shame that attends it, since he knows he hath deserved shame, and desires by his ingenuous blushes before a pious and compassionate friend, to prevent being shamed before men and angels at the last day.”¹⁰⁷

On the Absolution he remarks, that the combination of the Deprecative and Indicative parts is very ancient, the first relating to our Lord, Who has the supreme power to forgive, the latter, to the power which He has delegated to the Priest; he sums up,

“Jesus gave this power to His Apostles, and they to their successors who communicated it to us by prayers and imposition of hands at our Ordination, saying,

Receive the Holy Ghost, whose sins ye remit, they are remitted’ &c. And now when we see good evidence that the sick man is prepared to receive this grace, and know he needs it exceedingly, and will be wonderfully supported by it, we give it him in God’s name, and he ought to look on us but as the instruments to convey the pardon which Jesus gives. . The absolution is only ministerially conveyed by the priest; but the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, in Whose name it is pronounced, do join in the confirmation thereof.”¹⁰⁸

5. WHEATLEY’S opinion, that the Church of England, in the form of Absolution in the Service for the sick, meant only an Absolution from Church censures is remarkable, not to say strange, since the part of the Absolution in the Sarum ritual,¹⁰⁹ which relates to Church censures, is omitted, and the sins, which the Priest is to “move the sick man to confess,” are sins, which lie upon his conscience, of which the Church has known nothing, and on which it has pronounced no censure. Yet he recognises that the Church of England did judiciously, in leaving confession free, but yet admitting it. And not this only, but he expresses a wish, that people used it oftener in health too, and fears that some omitted it to their soul’s hurt.

“No argument sure can be drawn, that because a practice has been abused, it should therefore cease to be used. The abuses of it should be reformed, but not the practice discontinued. And therefore the Church of England at the reformation, in the particular now before us, freed it from all the encroachments with which the Church of Rome had embarrassed it, and reduced confession to its primitive plan. She neither calls it a sacrament, nor requires it to be used as universally necessary.” Then, quoting the exhortation in the Service for Holy Communion and the advice in Edward viths first book, he adds, “What could have been added more judiciously than this, to temper, on the one hand, the rigours of those who were too apt at that time to insist upon confession, as always absolutely necessary to salvation: and to prevent, on the other hand, a carelessness in those who, being prejudiced against the abuse, were apt indiscriminately to reject the thing, as at no time needful or useful to a penitent. So that we may still, I presume, wish, very consistently with the determinations of our Church, that our people would apply themselves, oftener than they do, to their spiritual physicians, even in the time of their

¹⁰⁷ The occasional Offices explained in the method of the Companion to the Temple. ‘The second part of the Exhortation contained in the rubric, ‘Then shall the sick man be moved.’ pp. 308—313.

¹⁰⁸ Occasional Offices l.c. Of the Absolution, p. 320.

¹⁰⁹ “Et sacramentis ecclesiae te restituo.” Man. Sarisb. f. 91 in Palmer, Orig. Lit. T. ii. p. 227. The subsequent prayer, which Wheatley quotes to support his argument, corresponds with this omission; for whereas the Sarum Manual has a prayer, ‘*restore* [restitu] this sick member to the unity of the body of Thy Church, having received the remission of sins;’ (Ib. p. 92.) our prayer is, “*preserve and continue* this sick person in the unity of the Church,” as never having been separated from it.

health; since it is much to be feared, that they are wounded oftener than they complain, and yet, through aversion to disclosing their Bore, suffer it to gangrene, for want of their help, who should work the cure.”

“But present ease is not the only benefit the penitent may expect from his confessor’s aid: he will be better assisted in the regulation of his life; and when his last conflict shall make its approach, the holy man, being no stranger to the state of his soul, will be better prepared to guide and conduct it through all difficulties that may oppose. However, if we have neglected to communicate our doubts and scruples in our health, we have more need of following the apostle’s advice when we are sick, viz. *to call for the elders of the church, and to confess our faults* in order to engage their *fervent prayers*. For this reason, though our Church leaves it in a manner to every one’s discretion, in the time of health, whether they will be satisfied with a general confession to God and the Church yet when they are sick, she thinks it proper that they ‘be MOVED to make a special confession of their sins to the) Priest, if they feel their conscience troubled with any weighty matter.’ For how will he be able to satisfy their doubts, if he be not let into the particulars of their case? Or with what assurance can he absolve them, or admit them to the peace and communion of the Church, before he is apprised, how far they have deserved its censure and bonds? If then they are desirous of the following consolations which the Church has provided for their quiet and ease, it is fit they should first declare and make known what burden it is, from which they want to be freed. How far the Church can assist or relieve them, or; what consolations they are which she administers, the Absolution here prescribed will lead us to consider: which, with the Collect that follows, shall be made the subject of the next section.”

The like statements occur also in later writers on the articles.

6. BP. TOMLINE while writing against, what he calls “the Popish Sacrament of Penance,” is compelled by the force of truth to acknowledge that the Church of England “encourages” confession.

“Confession of sin to God is an indispensable duty, and confession to priests may sometimes be useful, by leading; to effectual repentance: and therefore our Church encourages its members to use confidential confession to their priest, or to any other minister of God’s holy Word.”¹¹⁰

7. DR. HEY, a lax writer, also writing against the Church of Rome and confession in it, is constrained to admit,

“Confession, in some sort private, is often commended by our divines, and even in our liturgy: we may instance in the first exhortation to the Communion, and in the Visitation of the Sick.”¹¹¹

He defines “judicial,” “relating to the Judge from Whom is no appeal,” Who must of course be God.

“In order to have an idea even of the historical part of the subject, one must attend to the distinction between ministerial and judicial. A person gives ministerial absolution when he acts as a minister or agent under God as a principal; judicial, when he acts in the capacity of a judge from whom lies no appeal. Nor can we proceed rightly without

¹¹⁰ Scriptural Exposition of the xxxix Articles; Art. xxv. Quoting Exhort, in Comm. Service.

¹¹¹ On Art. xxv. Lectures T. iv. 218.

remarking here, that all judicial absolution must consist in releasing offenders from punishments inflicted by religious society among men, or from Church censures: and that all anticipation of the day of judgement, in absolving, must be ministerial; its end, to warn and comfort: though every decision of a minister or agent will undoubtedly be ratified, if the agent acts in his proper character, and is rightly informed; which he cannot be, except the repentance, in any case before him, be sincere: and as he can only pronounce absolution on supposition of Sincerity in his penitent, his absolution must be, in some sort, conditional.”¹¹²

8. BISHOP HAROLD BROWNE, while distinguishing confession, as used among us, from that in the Church of Rome, quotes the two exhortations in the Communion-Service and the Visitation of the sick.

“Thus the Church of England provides for all troubled consciences the power of relieving themselves, by making confession of guilt to their pastor or ‘any other discreet and learned minister,’ and so gives them comfort and counsel; but does not bind every one, of necessity, to rehearse all his private sins to man, nor elevate such useful confession into a sacrament essential to salvation.”¹¹³

Even while warning against the misuse of confession, he says, “Access to confession is not to be denied to the dying, the perplexed, or the broken-hearted.”¹¹⁴

III. It will seem strange to the modern assailants of confession that two of the earliest practical writers, who recommend auricular confession, as a religious practice, should be Puritan writers.

i. WILLIAM TURNER, Dean of Wells, who is placed among the reformers, even marvels, that, since God had attached such promises to confession, any were not drawn to it. The main exception, which he makes, is grounded on the ignorance of the then Confessors.

“We do not utterly forsake auricular or ear confession: but the additions of man’s traditions are parted and sundered from wholesome doctrine, as chaff is from the corn.....”¹¹⁵

“If any doubt arise in our consciences, whom ought we rather to go to and ask counsel, than of the head man of our souls? Furthermore, when we be faint-hearted, or have no courage, and are vexed with temptations, *we may not despise the remedy that God ordained.* Thou hast God’s word, Matt, xviii. John xx. ‘*Whose sins ye remit*’ &c. Whom would not these fatherly promises provoke ‘and allure to confession, when the conscience is lifted up and established, not by man’s word, but by God’s word spoken by man’s mouth?’”

“Let the Bishops appoint learned men to hear confessions, and not blockheads, and then the people shall come to the priests by heaps and swarms. The which thing while they do not, let them blame themselves and not us, if the people set little by their curates.”

¹¹² Ib. 220. 221.

¹¹³ On the Articles. Art. xxv. p. 587.

¹¹⁴ Ib. p. 588.

¹¹⁵ The Old and New Learning. Tracts of Anglican Fathers, Vol. iv. p. 607, 608. Hatchard, 1809.

ii. The belief of THOMAS BECON, how Absolution is effective, was different probably from that of any, who accept or reject it now. Yet he is urgent that it be used, and believes in its instantaneous operation.

“Why auricular confession should be condemned and exiled from the bounds of Christianity, I see no cause; but that it should be approved, retained, maintained, and used, I find causes many, yea, and these right urgent and necessary. That it is a thing of much weight and grave importance, it appeareth well, inasmuch as it bringeth to men divers ample commodities and large profits. .. It bringeth high tranquillity to the troubled conscience of a Christian man, while the most comfortable words of Absolution are rehearsed to him by the Priest.”¹¹⁶ “And when he shall rehearse unto you the most sweet and comfortable words of Absolution, give earnest faith unto them, , being undoubtedly persuaded that your sins at that time be assuredly forgiven you, as though God Himself had spoken them, according to that saying of Christ, ‘He that heareth you, heareth Me;’ and again, ‘Whose sins ye forgive, are forgiven them.’”¹¹⁷

iii. HOOKER, to whom the epithet of “judicious” was still, in this century, as much appropriated, as “swift of foot” was by Homer to Achilles, and who is himself recorded to have used confession,¹¹⁸ insists on the freedom of using or not using confession.

“Such complements are helps to support our weakness, and not causes that serve to produce His gifts.”¹¹⁹

“For private confession and absolution it stands thus with us; the minister’s power to absolve is publicly taught and professed; the Church not denied to have authority either of abridging or enlarging the use and exercise of that power; upon the people no such necessity imposed of opening their transgressions unto men, as if remission of sins otherwise were impossible; neither any such opinion had of the thing itself, as though it were either unlawful or unprofitable, saving only for those inconveniences, which the world hath by experience observed in it heretofore. And in regard thereof, the Church of England hitherto hath thought it the safer way, to refer men’s hidden crimes unto God and themselves only; howbeit, not without special caution, for admonition of such as come to the holy Sacrament, and for the comfort of such as are ready to depart the world.”

“First, because there are but few that consider how much that part of divine service which consisteth in partaking the holy Eucharist doth import their souls; what they lose by neglect thereof, and what by devout practice they might attain unto: therefore, lest carelessness of general confession should, as commonly it doth, extinguish all remorse of men’s particular enormous crimes; our custom (whenever men present themselves at the Lord’s Table) is, solemnly to give them very fearful admonition what woes are perpendicularly hanging over the heads of such as dare adventure to put forth their unworthy hands to those admirable mysteries of life, which have by rare examples been proved conduits of irremediable death to impenitent receivers; whom therefore as

¹¹⁶ Potation for Lent. Parker Society Ed. p. 100.

¹¹⁷ Ib. p. 101. The “Potation” was revised by Becon 1560—1564, but the paragraph, in its passage occurs, was left unaltered.

¹¹⁸ Walton’s lives, Life of Hooker, p. 188. Christian knowledge Ed.

¹¹⁹ Eccles. Pol. vi. iv. 15. T. iii. p. 50. 2nd ed. Keble.

we repel being known, so being not known we can but terrify.”

“Leaving therefore unto His judgement those whom we cannot stay from casting their souls into so great hazard, we have, in the other part of penitential jurisdiction, in our power and authority to release sin, joy on all sides, without trouble or molestation unto any.¹²⁰

“They which during life and health, are never destitute of ways to delude repentance, do notwithstanding oftentimes, when their last hour draweth on, both feel that sting which before lay dead in them, and also thirst after such helps as have been always till then unsavoury.”

“Because to countervail the faults of delay, there are in the latest repentance oftentimes the surest tokens of sincere dealing; therefore, upon special confession made to the minister of God, he presently absolveth in this case the sick party from all his sins by that authority which Jesus Christ hath committed unto him, knowing that God respecteth not so much what time is spent, as what truth is shewed in repentance.”

“If peace with God do not follow the pains we have taken in seeking after it, if we continue disquieted, and not delivered from anguish, mistrusting whether that we do be sufficient; it argueth that our sore doth exceed the power of our own skill, and that the wisdom of the pastor must bind up those parts, which, being bruised, are not able to be recured of themselves.”

But more widely; in assigning the reason “which moved sinners thus voluntarily to detect themselves both in private and public,” he names one, which applied to all times, and which must have moved himself to confession.

“Because the knowledge, how to handle our own sores is no vulgar or common art, but we either carry towards ourselves, for the most part, an over-soft and gentle hand, fearful of touching too near the quick; or else, endeavouring not to be partial, we fall into timorous scrupulosities, and sometimes into those extreme discomforts of mind, from which we hardly do ever lift up our heads again; men thought it the safest way to disclose their secret faults, and to crave imposition of penance from them, whom our Lord Jesus Christ hath left in His Church to be spiritual and ghostly physicians, the guides and pastors of redeemed souls, whose office doth not only consist in general persuasions to amendment of life, but also in the private particular cure of diseased minds.”¹²¹

iv. BISHOP ANDREWES, who, after 2 ½ centuries, is still accounted one of the most thoughtful and fervid of our preachers, begins his sermon on our Lord’s words, “Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them;”

“They be the words of our Saviour Christ to His Apostles; they contain a commission by Him granted to the Apostles.¹²²

“Which commission is His first largess after His rising again. For at His first appearing to them, it pleased Him not to come empty but with a blessing, and to bestow on them and on the world by them, as the first-fruits of His resurrection, this commission; a part of that commission which the sinful world most of all stood in need of, for remission of sins.”

He closes the Sermon;

¹²⁰ Ib. l.c, p. 52.

¹²¹ Eccl. Pol. vi. iv. 7. pp. 30, 31.

¹²² Sermon on Absolution, Sermon iv. T. v. p. 82. ed. Ang. Cath. ed.

“And here I should now speak somewhat of the applying or use of it, but the time hath overtaken me and will not permit it. Now only a word of the third part, of the efficacy, or, as the lawyers term it, of God’s ratihibition, and so an end.¹²³

“Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew to them that should be partakers of it the stableness of His counsel, He hath penned it exceedingly effectually, and indeed strangely to them that deeply consider of it; which He hath so done, to the end that thereby such poor sinners as shall be partakers of it might have strong consolation and perfect assurance, not to waver in the hope which is set before them.

“And to that end, even for comfort, I will only point at four things in the inditing of it, all expressing the efficacy of it in more than common manner.

“1. The order is this, that ‘ye remit’ standeth first, and ‘are remitted’ second. It is S. Chrysostom’s note, that it beginneth in earth, and that heaven followeth after. So that whereas in prayer and in other parts of religion it is ‘as in heaven, so in earth,’ here it is, ‘as in earth, so in heaven.’ A terra judicandi principalem auctoritatem sumit cœlum. For the judge sits on earth; the Lord follows His servant, and whatever judgement the servant gives here below, that judgement the Lord ratifies above, saith he.

“2. The time in this, that it is ‘are remitted’ in the present tense; there is no delay between, no deferring or holding in suspense, but the absolution pronounced upon earth, ‘are remitted,’ presently they are remitted; that He saith not, hereafter they shall be, but they ‘are’ already ‘remitted.’

“3. The manner, in setting down of the two words. For it is so delivered by Christ, as if He were content it should be accounted their act, and that the Apostles were the agents in it, and Himself but the patient, and suffered it to be done. For the Apostles’ part is delivered in the active, ‘ye remit,’ and His own in the passive, ‘are remitted.’

“4. The certainty; which in the identity of the word, in not changing the word, but keeping the selfsame in both parts. For Christ hath not thus indited it: ‘Whose sins ye wish or ye pray for,’ or, ‘Whose sins ye declare to be remitted;’ but, ‘Whose sins ye remit;’ using no other word in the Apostles’ than He useth in His own. And to all these, in S. Matthew, He addeth His solemn protestation of ‘Verily, verily;’ or, ‘Amen, Amen,’ that so it is and shall be. And all to certify us that He fully meaneth with effect to ratify in heaven that is done in earth, to the sure and stedfast comfort of them that shall partake it.”

And of himself, personally, he says, in the devotions, which he framed, and which, upon his departure, were found, it is recorded, “moistened with his pious tears;”

“My soul doth praise the Lord—for Thy mercies towards myself, soul body and estate—keeping me from perishing in my sins’ fully waiting my conversion, leaving in me return into my heart, remembrance of my latter end, shame, horror, grief for my past sins, fuller and larger, larger and fuller, more and still more, O my Lord, storing me with good hope of their remission through repentance and its works; *in the power of the thrice-holy Keys* and the mysteries in Thy Church.”¹²⁴ “Every day will I give thanks unto Thee, and praise Thy Name for ever and ever,——Who hast opened to me a gate of hope while I confess and implore, *through the power of Thy mysteries and the Keys.*”¹²⁵

In his Mss. Notes on the Prayer-book¹²⁶ on the words

¹²³ Ib. 1. c. p. 101.

¹²⁴ Andrewes’ Devotions, translated from the Greek, for the third day. pp.66, 67. ed. 1848.

¹²⁵ Private Devotions, translated from the Latin, pp. 13, 17. ed. 1846.

¹²⁶ Minor Works p. 155. Ang. Cath.

‘That he may receive the benefit of absolution,’ he says, “It is most expedient that this be read, to induce the people that they bethink themselves of the sovereign benefit of absolution by their penitent confession.”

v. JOHN BOYS, Dean of Canterbury, wrote a work once much read, “Exposition of the Festival Epistles and Gospels used in our English Liturgy,” in the rather unrefined style common in his age, yet with a good deal of freshness, a large miscellaneous reading and good quotations from the fathers. He himself ascribes his knowledge as well as his being, to God as their Giver.¹²⁷ In his exposition of the Gospel for the 19th Sunday after Trinity, he expresses his unfeigned wish that confession and absolution were restored unto their primitive sincerity. Unhappily it is not a passage, which gives any idea of his better style.

“In that Christ said here, ‘Thy sins are forgiven thee,’ notwithstanding He knew the Scribes would murmur and mutter against His speech, He teacheth us to be faithful in our calling, and diligent in doing our duty, maugre the beard of all captious and cavilling adversaries.—’Hath then Almighty God *given such power unto men*, as to pronounce the pardon of sin to the sick man in his bed?’ Is the doctrine of confession and absolution agreeable to the Scriptures and practice of the Church as well present as primitive? Then, albeit some scribbling scribe pen an invective pamphlet against a discreet pastor executing this office, or some self-conceited Pharisee tell the people ‘this man blasphemeth,’ he may notwithstanding (upon good information of faith and repentance, as Christ in this place) say to the sick sinner in his bed, ‘thy sins are forgiven thee,’ and by Christ’s authority committed unto him I absolve thee.’ That absolution, as well private as publick, belongs principally, yea properly, *tanquam ex officio*, to the Minister, as Christ’s Ambassador, in his ecclesiastical function, I refer you to the Postiles of Melancthon &c.¹²⁸ For my own part, I wish unfeignedly that, all popish abuses of Confession and Absolution utterly abolished, they might one day be more fully restored in our Protestant Churches unto their primitive sincerity.”¹²⁹

vi. Of DR. DONNE, (died A.D. 1631,) it is needless to say any thing, after the biography of Isaac Walton. His words are part of a sermon, preached to the king’s household at Whitehall, and so not a simple statement of a truth but as something to be acted upon. He praises the tenderness of conscience which would make confession before every communion;

“For confession, we require public confession in the congregation; and in time of sickness, upon the death-bed, we enjoin private and particular confession, if the conscience be oppressed; and if any man do think that that which is necessary for him upon his death-bed, is necessary every time he comes to the Communion, and so come to such a confession, if anything lie upon him, as often as he comes to the Communion, we blame not, we dissuade not, we discourse not, that tenderness of conscience, and that

¹²⁷ In his Title page, he is represented kneeling with the motto, “In eo sumus et scimus.”

¹²⁸ He quotes besides, Culmann, Zepperus upon this place, Bucer in artic. Concordiæ; Melancthon in S. Matt, xviii. 18, in Joann. xx. 23, de penit. tit. Confessio. T. 2. f. 191. Olevian de subst. fœderis P. ii. pp. 298. sqq. Luther, Musculus, Cruciger ap. Melancth. In consiliis Theol. Field, of the Church, iii. 25; White, Way to the true Church pp. 230. 231.

¹²⁹ Works p. 522.

safe proceeding in that good soul.”¹³⁰

vii. BISHOP LEWIS BAYLY.¹³¹

One of the most popular books of devotion, which the English Church ever had, is “The Practice of piety,” whose name at least is probably familiar to many who know not its author, which, early in the 17th century, was translated into Welsh, French and German, and, before the last dreary century, passed through 51 editions. It can hardly, even in these days, be represented as alien from the mind of the English Church.

“(Table of Contents)—Of the comfortable use of true Absolution.”¹³²

“The sick person ought now to send for some godly and religious pastor.

“In any wise remember (if conveniently it may be) to send for some godly and religious pastor, not only to pray for thee at thy death (for God in such a case hath promised to hear the prayers of the righteous prophets and elders of the Church), but also upon thy confession and unfeigned repentance to absolve thee of thy sins. For Christ hath given him a ... calling and power, and authority (upon repentance) to absolve thee from thy sins. ‘I will give thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind upon earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.’ And again, ‘Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.’ And again, ‘Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained.’ ... These have the power to shut heaven, and to deliver (the scandalous impenitent sinner) to Satan: for the weapons of their warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to cast down &c., and to have vengeance in readiness against all disobedience. They have the key of loosing; therefore, the power of absolving.

“The Bishops and pastors of the Church do not forgive sins by any absolute power of their own, (for so only Christ their Master forgiveth sins,) but ministerially, as the servants of Christ, and stewards, to whose fidelity their Lord and Master hath committed His keys ... For Christ from heaven doth by them (as by His ministers on earth) declare whom He remitteth and bindeth, and to whom He will open the gates of heaven, and against whom He will shut them. And therefore it is not said, ‘Whose sins ye signify to be remitted,’ but ‘Whose sins ye remit.’ They then do remit sins, because Christ by their ministry remitteth sins, as Christ by His disciples loosed Lazarus Though another man may pronounce the same words, yet have they not the like efficacy and power to work on the conscience, as when they are pronounced from the mouth of Christ’s ministers, because the promise is annexed to the Word of God in their mouths; for them hath He chosen, separated, and set apart for this work, and to them He hath committed the ministry and word of reconciliation: by their holy calling and ordination they have received the Holy Ghost, and the ministerial power of binding and loosing. They are sent forth of the Holy Ghost for this work, whereunto He hath called them.

“And Christ gives His ministers power to forgive sins to the penitent in the same

¹³⁰ Serm. 139. near the end, preached to the Household at Whitehall, April 30. 1626. Sermons. T. v. p. 505.

¹³¹ L. Bayly, Bp. of Bangor, died A. 1632.

¹³² “Practice of Piety, directing a Christian how to walk that he may please God.” pp. 432—439. The Rev. Canon Cooke, from whom this extract is taken, says, “I quote from the *fifty-first edition*, published In 1714; but I have seen a reference to the seventy-second edition.”

words that He teacheth us in the Lord's Prayer to desire God to forgive us our sins: to assure all penitent sinners, that God, by His minister's absolution, doth fully, through the merits of Christ's Blood, forgive them all their sins ... So that what Christ decreeth in heaven, in foro iudicii, the same He declareth on earth by His reconciling ministers, in foro pœnitentiæ. So that as God hath reconciled the world to Himself by Jesus Christ, so hath He (saith the Apostle) given unto us the ministry of this reconciliation.

“Though others may comfort with good words, yet none can absolve from sin, but only those to whom Christ hath committed the holy ministry and word of reconciliation: and of their absolution Christ speaketh, ‘He that heareth you heareth Me.’ In a doubtful title thou wilt ask the counsel of a skilful lawyer; in peril of sickness thou wilt know the advice of the learned physician: and is there no danger in dread of damnation, for a sinner to be his judge?

“And verily there is not any means more excellent to humble a proud heart, nor to raise up an humble spirit, than this spiritual conference between the pastors and the people committed to their charge. If any sin therefore troubleth thy conscience, confess it to God's minister; ask his counsel, and if thou dost truly repent, receive his absolution. And then doubt not, in foro conscientiae, but thy sins be as verily forgiven on earth, as if thou didst hear Christ Himself, in foro iudicii, pronouncing them to be forgiven in heaven. ‘He that heareth you, heareth Me.’ Try this, and tell me, whether thou shalt not find more ease in thy conscience than can be expressed in words. Did profane men consider the *dignity* of this divine calling, they would the more honour the calling and reverence the persons.”

viii. BISHOP HALL. There is perhaps scarce any writer in our Church, who for his love, affectionateness, simplicity and unction, is more loved than Bishop Hall. He was Also a controversial writer: in one of his works, he takes a position of utter antagonism to Rome, entitling it “No peace with Rome.” Yet as a practical writer, concerned about the well-being of souls, he weighs the question of confession as a case of conscience.

Case ix.:¹³³ “Whether I need, in case of some foul sin Committed by me, to have recourse to God's Minister for absolution; and what effect I may expect therefrom?” He answers;

“Two cases there are, wherein certainly there is a necessity of applying ourselves to the judgement of our spiritual guides.¹³⁴

“The first is, in our doubt of the nature and quality of the fact, whether it be a sin or no sin. Whither shall we go in these doubts, but to our counsel, learned in the laws of God, of whom God Himself hath said by His prophet, ‘The priest's lips should keep knowledge; and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the Lord of Hosts’?

“The second is, in the irresoluble condition of our souls, after a known sin committed; wherein the burdened conscience, not being able to give ease unto itself, seeks for aid to the sacred hand of God's Penitentiary here on earth, and there may find it.

“If, after all these penitent endeavours, you find your soul still unquiet, and not sufficiently apprehensive of a free and full forgiveness, betake yourself to God's faithful

¹³³ Resolution and decision of divers practical cases of conscience. Case ix. Works T. vii. p. 451 sqq. ed. Hall. Bp. Hall died A.D. 1656.

¹³⁴ l.c. Ib. p. 452.

agent for peace; run to your ghostly physician; lay your bosom open before him; flatter not your own condition; let neither fear nor shame stay his hand from probing and Searching the wound to the bottom; and that being done, make careful use of such spiritual applications, as shall be By him administered to you. This, this is the way to a perfect recovery and fulness of comfort.¹³⁵

“But you easily grant, that there may be very wholesome use of the ghostly counsel of your minister, in the case of a troubled soul: but you doubt of the validity and power of his absolution; concerning which it was a just Question of the Scribes in the Gospel, ‘Who can forgive but God only?’ Our Saviour, therefore, to prove that He had this power, argues it from His Divine potence: He only hath authority to forgive sins, that can say to the decrepid paralytic, ‘Arise take up thy bed, and walk.’ None but a God can, by His command, effect this He is, therefore, the true God, that may absolutely say, ‘Thy sins be forgiven thee.’ If therefore man or angel shall challenge to himself this absolute power to forgive sin, let him be accursed. Yet, withal, it must be yielded, that the blessed Son of God spake not those words of His commission in vain: ‘Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained.’ neither were they spoken to the then present apostles only, but, in them, to all their faithful successors to the end of the world.

“It cannot, therefore, but be granted, that there is some kind of power left in the hand of Christ’s ministers both to remit and retain sin.

“Neither is this power given only to the governors the Church, in relation to the censures to be inflicted relaxed by them; but to all God’s faithful ministers, in, relation to the sins of men; a power, not sovereign and absolute, but limited and ministerial; for either quieting the conscience of the penitent, or further aggravating the conscience of sin and terror of judgement to the obstinate and rebellious.

“Neither is this only by way of a bare verbal declaration which might proceed from any other lips; but in the way of an operative and effectual application, by virtue of that delegate or missionary authority, which is by Christ entrusted with them. For certainly our Saviour meant, in these words, to confer somewhat upon His minister more than the rest of the world should be capable to receive or perform.

“We may well say, that, whatsoever is in this case done God’s minister, (the key not erring) is ratified in heaven.

“Although, therefore, you may, perhaps, through God’s goodness, attain to such a measure of knowledge and resolution, as to be able to give yourself satisfaction concerning the state of your soul; yet it cannot be amiss, out of an abundant caution, to take God’s minister along with you, and, making him of your spiritual counsel, to unbosom yourself to him freely, for his fatherly advice and concurrence: the neglect whereof, through a kind of either strangeness or misconceit, is certainly not a little disadvantageous to the souls of many Christians.”

Bp. Hall here speaks of the disadvantage of its neglect to the souls of many. In his “Balm of Gilead, or the Comforter,” he dwells on its comfort.

Under the head ‘Comforts for the sick soul’ he speaks first, on ‘the happiness of a deep sorrow for sin,’¹³⁶ and bids the penitent ‘weep still, and make not too much haste to dry up those tears,’ and then he teaches ‘The well-grounded declaration of pardon.’

¹³⁵ Ib. pp. 453, 454.

¹³⁶ c. 2. s. i.

“But, when thou hast emptied thine eyes of tears, and unloaded thy breast of leisurely sighs, I shall then, by full Commission from Him that hath the power of remission, say to thee, ‘Son, be of good comfort, thy sins are forgiven thee.’¹³⁷

“Think not this word merely formal and forceless. He that ‘hath the keys of hell and of death,’ hath not said in vain, ‘Whose sins ye remit, they are remitted.’ The words of His faithful ministers on earth are ratified in heaven...

“I am, howsoever unworthy, a messenger sent to thee from heaven; and, in the name of that great God that sent me, I do here, upon the sight of thy serious repentance, before angels and men, declare thy soul to stand right in the court of heaven: the invaluable ransom of thy dear Saviour is laid down and accepted for thee: thou art delivered from going down into the pit of horror and perdition.”

ix. GEORGE HERBERT. His book, *The Country Parson* formed part of a series, put into our hands of old, as “*The Clergyman’s Instructor*.” Under the head, “*The Parson j comforting*,” he represents him as “persuading to particular confession; and how necessary it is in some cases.”

“In his visiting the sick or otherwise afflicted, he followeth the Church’s counsel, viz. in persuading them to particular confession; labouring to make them understand the great good use of this ancient and pious ordinance, and how necessary it is in some cases.”¹³⁸

x. J. MEDE had the by-name, I think, of “the judicious” as well as “the learned.” He lived in days, when the Bishop of Rome was still called Anti-Christ, and himself used, the term. The sermon on repentance was one which he had carefully revised, having been preached before the University.

“An effect of this contrition is Confession; when out, of a contrite and wounded heart, we acknowledge and lay open our sins before the face of Almighty God (our heavenly Father), begging pardon and forgiveness for them. A duty always necessary to be performed to God Himself, Whom we have chiefly and principally offended; and in, some cases also convenient to be made unto His ministers, not only for advice, but for consolation, by that power and authority which God hath given them to exercise in His Name, according to that, ‘Whose sins ye remit, shall be remitted.’”¹³⁹

xi. A.D. 1627. the Pope sent PANZANI an Oratorian, to “pacify the dissensions between the secular and regular Clergy, respecting the appointment of a Bishop; but still to discover, if possible, his Majesty’s (Charles I) sentiments on that point, and his general views respecting the Catholics.”¹⁴⁰

In his report he gives an account of the state of religion in the English Church also, and says on this point “the practice of auricular confession is praised.” He seems to bespeaking especially, perhaps, of “public Sermons before the King and Court.”

¹³⁷ *Ib.* and sect. 2, Works vii. p. 122

¹³⁸ *The Country Parson* c. xv.

¹³⁹ Disc. xxvi. Works p. 109. fol. “The larger discourses were preached before the University.” General Pref.

¹⁴⁰ His account is dated 1627: see Butler, *Hist. Mem.* Vol. ii. p. 339.1. ii.

xii. BISHOP COSIN,¹⁴¹ in his once popular¹⁴² ‘Collection of Private Devotions/ set it down as the fifth of the Precepts of the Church;

“5.¹⁴³ To receive the Blessed Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ with frequent devotion, and three times a year at least, of which Easter to be always one. And for better preparation thereunto, as occasion is, to disburthen and quiet our consciences of those sins that pay grieve us, or scruples that may trouble us, to a learned and discreet Priest, and from him to receive advice, and the benefit of absolution.”

In a list which he drew up of the Agreements and Differences¹⁴⁴ between the Roman Catholics and the Church of England, he set down, among the agreements, “the public or private absolution of penitent sinners.”

Even to teach the *necessity* of Confession was not condemned then. A preacher, named Adams, having preached that¹⁴⁵ “special confession unto a priest (actually, where time or opportunity presents itself, or otherwise in explicit intention and resolution) of all our sins committed after baptism, so far forth as we do remember, is necessary unto salvation; so that, according to the ordinance or revealed means appointed by Christ, there can be no salvation without the aforesaid confession,” the Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge prepared a recantation. Upon Adams’ refusal to accept it, the proposition that he should be required to sign it, was rejected by a majority of “eight of the heads of the University against five,”—Cosin being one of the eight.¹⁴⁶

The ground ascribed to Cosin, if true,¹⁴⁷ would be remarkable, that the Church of England in the thirty-nine Articles, where it condemned the opinions and points of Popery that he thought Mr. Adams and others are bound also to condemn, did not yet condemn the opinion that some men had of the necessity of special confession, and that the Book of Common Prayer seemed rather to give a man liberty to be of that opinion than to condemn him for it, where it says, “If a man cannot quiet himself &c.”

But remarkable also was the recantation prepared for him, which, while requiring him to acknowledge, that confession to God sufficed, yet proposed to him to acknowledge also,¹⁴⁸ “in the case of a troubled or doubtful conscience, I do conform my opinion unto the direction of our Church, which in her Liturgy doth *exhort* and *require* those whose consciences are troubled with any weighty matter, to a special confession; so that they who cannot quiet their own consciences are to repair &c.”

xiii. The private practice of Archbishop LAUD in his visitation of the sick we know from his book of “private devotions.” In them he puts down in Latin under the

¹⁴¹ Dr. Cosin A.D. 1627. was commissioned by Bp. White to draw up his manual; when it was drawn up, Mountain, Bp. of London put the imprimatur with his own hand. It is said to have been held in most esteem, next to the Prayer-book.

¹⁴² The xith. edition was, after the dreary interval of the 18th century, reprinted at Oxford in 1838.

¹⁴³ Preface p. lxxxi.

¹⁴⁴ Originally printed, from a copy which Bp. Cosin gave to Hickes in an Appendix to “several letters which passed between Dr. G. Hickes and a Popish priest,” Paper iv.; afterwards at the end of Dr. Bull’s “Corruptions of the Church of Rome,” and in Bp. Cosin’s Works, Agreement No. 6. Vol. iv. 336.

¹⁴⁵ As quoted in the recantation prepared for him. Collier Eccles. Hist, viii. 121.

¹⁴⁶ Collier, Ecc. Hist. viii. 120—122. Collier quotes Rushworth’s Hist. Collection P. ii. p. 1378. &c. as the authority for the statement, that the whole proceedings of this affair were sent up “to Abp. Laud, and that the account was transmitted to him by Dr. Cosin.”

¹⁴⁷ “State papers” quoted in the Church Review Feb. 2. 1867. Church and the world. 2nd Series p. 222.

¹⁴⁸ in Collier l.c.

head, "Visitation of the sick," heads of questions which he would ask the sick man:

"Dost thou confess—¹⁴⁹

"1. That thou hast not lived as well as thou oughtest, yea, that thou hast lived ill, and hast sinned often and gravely?

"2. Is there any sin beyond or above the rest? or are there any sins which weigh upon thy conscience, so that thou hast need of the benefit of special absolution?

"3. Hast thou any scruple concerning the matters of faith and religion?" with other questions leading a sick man to repentance.

His public defence of his faith appears in his trial for his life, when one of the charges, founded on the Scotch Canon, was, "that he went about to establish auricular confession and popish absolution." The Canon which had been sent for the revision of himself and Bishop Juxon and so had the approbation of both, was formed on our Canon of 1603. It ran:¹⁵⁰

"Albeit Sacramental confession and Absolution have been in some places very much abused, yet if any of the people be grieved in mind for any delict or offence committed, and for the unburdening of his conscience, confess, the same to the bishop or presbyter; they shall, as they are bound, minister to the person so confessing all spiritual consolations out of the Word of God; and shall not deny him the benefit of Absolution, after the manner which is prescribed in the Visitation of the sick, if the party shew himself truly penitent, and humbly desire to be absolved. And he shall not make known or reveal what hath been opened to him in confession at any time, or to any person whatsoever, except the crime be such as by the laws of the realm his own life may be called in question for concealing the same."

His answer is, "For the matter of the Canon, if here be anything to establish 'Popish confession or absolution,' I humbly submit it to the learned of the Reformed Churches through Christendom: all men (for ought I yet know) allowing 'confession' and 'absolution' as most useful for the good of Christians, and condemning only the binding of all men to confess all sins, upon absolute danger of salvation. And this indeed some call *carnificinam conscientiae*, 'the rack or torturing of the conscience;' but impose no other necessity of confessing than the weight of their own conscience shall lay upon them; and no other enforcement to receive absolution, than their Christian care to ease their own conscience shall lead them unto: and in that way Calvin commends confession exceedingly; and if you mark it? you shall find that our Saviour Christ, Who gives the priest full power of the keys 'to bind and loose;' that is, to receive confession, and to absolve or not absolve, as he sees cause in the delinquent: yet you shall not find any command of His to enforce men to come to the priest to receive this benefit. It is enough that He hath left power in the ministry of the Church to give penitent Christians this ease, safety, and comfort, if they will receive it, when they need. If they need, and will not come; or if they need, and will not believe they do so, let them bear their own burden."

xiv. The opinion of the laity in Laud's time, is expressed by LORD WENTWORTH, afterwards LORD STRAFFORD.

¹⁴⁹ Private Devotions, pp. 187, 188. ed. 1838. These Devotions were published about 19 years after his Martyrdom, with the Imprimatur of Archbishop Sheldon, and Vice-Chancellor Fell, from the original MS. in the archives of S. John's college.

¹⁵⁰ Hist. of the troubles and trials of Abp. Laud. Works iii. p. 331. Ang. Cath. Lib.

“There is something further touching Confession in these Canons than are in those of England, and in my poor judgement much to the better. For howbeit auricular Confession to the parish priest is not allowed as a necessary duty to be imposed upon the conscience, yet did I never hear any but commend the free and voluntary practice of it to such a worthy and holy person as should be thought fit to communicate with, in so serious and important a business.”¹⁵¹

xv. I cannot quote CHILLINGWORTH, as a representative of the Church of England. I fear that he died an Arian. It is, however, not a little remarkable that he accepted the writings of the best times of the Primitive Church, “as the safest interpreter of Scripture.” For in that case he would not be far from the rule of Vincent of Lerins, the “quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus.” But now those who have ever in their mouths his and their favourite maxim, “The Bible and the Bible only the religion of Protestants,” will do well to consider, what he derived purely from Holy Scripture, where those, so hot against us, find nothing. The author of “The religion of Protestants a safe way to salvation,” in his Sermon makes this appeal,¹⁵²

“This truth being so evident in Scripture and in the writings of the ancient best times of the Primitive Church, the safest interpreters of Scripture, I make no question, but there will not be found one person amongst you, who, when he shall be in a calm impartial disposition, will offer to deny it. For, I beseech you, give yourselves leave impartially to examine your own thoughts:

“Can any man be so unreasonable as once to imagine with himself, that when our Saviour, after His resurrection, having received (as Himself saith) all power in heaven and earth, having led captivity captive, came then to bestow gifts upon men; when He, I say, in so solemn a manner (having first breathed upon His disciples, thereby conveying and insinuating the Holy Ghost into their hearts,) renewed unto them, or rather confirmed and sealed unto them, that glorious commission, which, before, He had given to Peter, sustaining, as it were, the person of the whole Church, whereby He delegated to them an authority of binding and loosing sins upon earth, with a promise that the proceedings in the court of heaven should be directed and regulated by theirs on earth; can any man, I say, think so unworthily of our Saviour, as to esteem these words of His for no better than compliment? for nothing but Court holy water?

“Yet so impudent have our adversaries of Rome been in their dealings with us, that they have dared to lay to our charge? as if we had so mean a conceit of our Saviour’s gift of the Keys; taking advantage indeed from the unwary expressions of some particular Divines, who, out of too forward a zeal against the church of Rome, have bended their staff too much the contrary way; and instead of taking away that intolerable burden of a sacramental, necessary, universal confession, have seemed to void and frustrate all use and exercise of the Keys.

“Since Christ, for your benefit and comfort, hath given Such authority to His ministers, upon your unfeigned repentance and contrition to absolve and release you from your sins; why should I doubt, or be unwilling to exhort and persuade you to make your advantage of this gracious promise of our Saviour’s? Why should I envy you the participation of so heavenly a blessing? Truly if I should deal thus with you, I should

¹⁵¹ Strafforde Letters, Vol. ii. p. 295.

¹⁵² Nine Sermons on special and eminent occasions, Sermon vii. Works pp. 83, 84.

prove myself a malicious, un-christian-like, malignant preacher; I should, wickedly and Unjustly, against my own conscience, seek to defraud you of those glorious blessings which our Saviour hath intended for you.

“Therefore, in obedience to His gracious will, and as I am warranted, and even enjoined, by my holy mother the Church of England expressly, in the Book of Common Prayer, in the rubric of Visiting the Sick, (which doctrine this Church hath likewise embraced so far,) I beseech you, that by your practice and use, you will not suffer that Commission, which Christ hath given to His Ministers, to be a vain form of words, without any sense under them to be an antiquated expired Commission, of no use nor validity in these days; but whensoever you find yourselves charged and oppressed, especially with such crimes as they call “*Peccata vastantia conscientiam*,” such as do lay waste and depopulate the conscience, that you would have recourse to your spiritual physician, and freely disclose the nature and malignancy of your disease, that he may be able, as the cause shall require, to proportion a remedy, either to search it with corrosives, or comfort and temper it with oil. And come not to him only with such a mind as you would go to a learned man experienced in the; Scriptures, as one that can speak comfortable, quieting words to you, but as to one that hath authority delegated to him from God Himself, to absolve and acquit you of your sins. If you shall do this, assure your souls, that the understanding of man is not able to conceive that transport and excess of joy and comfort, which shall accrue to that man’s heart, that is persuaded that he hath been made partaker of this blessing orderly and legally according as our Saviour Christ hath prescribed.”

xvi. BISHOP SANDERSON was originally a *Sublapsarian*, (a *Supralapsarian* he could never be).¹⁵³ He was one of the Commissioners at the last review of the Prayer-book. He himself received Absolution from his chaplain a day before his death.¹⁵⁴

The case put to him was as to the bindingness of a vow of two persons, each married to another, to each other, that, whichever should first be freed from the bond of matrimony, should wait for the other, until the other also should be freed. The case related to the lady, whose husband was deceased. Bp. Sanderson gives his opinion, that the promise was null *ab initio*, and among other wise advice recommends that the lady, who had made the sinful promise, should first be led to true contrition of heart and then to confession. There had (it is stated) been no act of sin. The confession then related to the promise, as being sin.

“Secondly, that having thus humbled herself before God by inward contrition, she also make an outward free confession of her said sins to him, to whom God hath delegated a ministerial power to remit sins, that she may receive comfort and absolution from his mouth; I mean the priest.”¹⁵⁵

And having suggested first that the confession should be made to the Bishop of the Diocese, or, “however, to a man of approved wisdom and zeal as shall be both compassionate and secret,” he adds, “wherein the more freely She shall make confession of her said sins, and the more cheerfully she shall subject herself to perform such further acts, whether of humiliation or charity, as the bishop or priest shall advise to be done, in

¹⁵³ Dr. Pierce’s letter appended to Walton’s life p. 366.

¹⁵⁴ Walton’s Lives p. 363.

¹⁵⁵ Eleven cases determined. Case viii. point v. n. 13. T. v. 99. ed. Jacobson.

testimony of her unfeigned repentance, the more sound comfort undoubtedly will the sentence of absolution bring unto the soul.”

xvii. DR. HAMMOND: I forget the wonted title of honour which he had in the mouths of men; but it was one, which implied confidence in him. He says;

“‘Shall be forgiven him’.¹⁵⁶ If ‘the Lord’ were the antecedent, it must have been in the active voice, ‘He shall remit them.’ And this in all probability it would have been, if it had been a promise of God’s pardon or remission; for then as it was said, ‘the Lord shall raise him up,’ so would it commodiously have been added, ‘if he have committed sins’ ‘He’ that is, the ‘Lord will remit them.’ By this impersonal form therefore somewhat else seems to be meant besides the Lord’s remission, and then that, from the precedent mention of the Elders of the Church, will be concluded to be the absolution of the Church in the hands of the elders thereof, the Bishops, [of which see Note on John xx. 23.] This is of two sorts; first a release of the offender from the public censures of the Church, Excommunication, &c. (inflicted on scandalous offenders upon public cognizance of their faults) upon repentance restoring such to their communion again: secondly, more private, in case of any wasting sin more privately committed, and in confession revealed to the spiritual person; in which case, upon faithful promise of reformation and obedience to spiritual advice and direction (upon recovery to health), the Elder may and ought to give the sick person the peace of the Church and the benefit of Absolution. And that being done by him Ministerially, and *pro officio* and *clave non errante*, as it brings the blessing and prayers of the Church along with it, so it may reasonably tend to the quieting of the conscience, and avoiding all scruple and doubtfulness (as our Church affirms in the Exhortation before the Communion) and be a means of obtaining a release from the disease, if God see fit, or a pawn and pledge of remission in heaven.”

“To which purpose it is certain, that as Repentance, if it be sincere, comprehends confession to God, and if the penitent desire to approve the sincerity of it to the spiritual person, and obtain Absolution from him, it is necessary that he make at least a general confession, and such as shall not hide any sort of his guilts from him; as we read at John Baptist’s Baptism, Matt. iii. 6, and in the story Matt. xix. 18, where the Greek Fathers and Scholiasts agree ‘Every faithful man ought to tell his offences, and to renounce and disclaim them.’”

xviii. BISHOP JEREMY TAYLOR, A. D. 1650. in a book which to this day is still one of the most popular of our religious books, says,¹⁵⁷

“Every true penitent is obliged to confess his sins, and to humble himself before God for ever. Confession of sins hath a special promise.—In all which circumstances, because we may very much be helped, if we take in the assistance of a spiritual guide, therefore the Church of God in all ages hath commended, and in most ages enjoined, that we confess our sins and discover the state and condition of our souls to such a person, whom we or our superiors judge fit to help us in such needs. For so, if we confess our sins one to another, as S. James advises, we shall obtain the prayers of the holy man whom God and the Church have appointed solemnly to pray for us; and when he knows

¹⁵⁶ On S. James v. 16.

¹⁵⁷ Holy Living. Works T. iv. p. 258, 259. ed. Heber.

our needs, he can best minister Comfort or reproof, oil or caustics; he can more particularly recommend your state to God; he can determine your cases of conscience, and judge better for you than you do for yourself; and the shame of opening such ulcers Way restrain your forwardness to contract them; and all circumstances of advantage will do very much towards the forgiveness. And this course was taken by the Hew converts in the days of the Apostles. 'For many that believed came and confessed and shewed their deeds.' And it were well, if this duty were practised prudently and innocently in order to public discipline, or private comfort and instruction; but that it be done to God is a duty, not directly for itself, but for its adjuncts, and the duties that go with it, or before it, or after it: which duties, because they are all to be helped and guided by our pastors and curates of souls, he is careful of his eternal interest that will not lose the advantage of using a private guide and judge."

"Let the minister of religion be sent to, not only against the agony of death, but be advised with in the whole conduct of the sickness. When the man is deadly sick, he cannot be called to confess his sins, and he is not able to remember them.¹⁵⁸

"S. James advises that when a man is sick, he should send for the elders. Whether they be many or few that are sent to the sick person, let the curate of the parish, or his own confessor, be amongst them; i. e. let him not be wholly advised by strangers, who know not his particular necessities; but he that is the ordinary judge cannot safely be passed by in his extraordinary necessity, which, in so great portions, depends upon his whole life past, and it is matter of suspicion, when we decline his judgement, that knows us best, and with whom we formerly did converse, either by choice or by law, by private election or public constitution.

"Confess your sins often, hear the word of God, make religion the business of your life, your study and chiefest care, and be sure that in all things a spiritual guide take you by the hand."¹⁵⁹

In a controversial work,¹⁶⁰ while arguing against the absolute necessity of Confession, he not only asserts its acceptance by the Church of England, but attests its actual use.

"When S. James exhorts all Christians to confess their sins one to another, certainly it is more agreeable to all spiritual ends, that this be done rather to the curates of souls than to the ordinary brethren. The church of England is no way engaged against it, but advises it, and practises it."

Again, he distinguishes,¹⁶¹ "There is a pardon which God only gives. He is the injured and offended person, and He alone can remit of His own right. But yet in this pardon the Church doth co-operate by her ministry."

In his treatise on The doctrine of Repentance, Bishop Taylor argues strongly that confession to a priest is not a necessary duty, but argues also that there might be a relative necessity.

"Confession to a priest, the minister of pardon and reconciliation, the curate of souls and the guide for consciences, is of so great use and benefit, to all that are heavy

¹⁵⁸ Holy Dying c. v. s. 2. 1. Works iv. 506, 507. Heber.

¹⁵⁹ Golden Grove, Agenda, n. 32. Works T. xv. p. 40. Heber.

¹⁶⁰ Dissuasive against Popery B. i. s. xi. n. 2, "Auricular confession imposed without authority from God." Works vi. 504. ed. Eden.

¹⁶¹ *Ib.* p. 518. no. 4.

laden with their sins, that they who carelessly and causelessly neglect it are neither lovers of the peace of consciences, nor are careful for the advantages of their souls. For the publication of our sins to the minister of holy things, said Basil, 'is just like the manifestation of the diseases of our body to the physician:' for God hath appointed them as spiritual physicians, 'to heal sinners by the antidote of repentance,' said the fathers in the first Roman Council under Simplicius.....There are many cases of conscience, which the penitent cannot determine, many necessities which he does not perceive, many duties which he omits, many abatements of duty which he ignorantly or presumptuously does make; much partiality in the determination of his own interests; and to build up a soul requires so much wisdom, so much severity, so many arts, such caution and observance, such variety of notices, great learning, great prudence, great piety; that as all ministers are not worthy of that charge and secret employment, and conduct of others in the more mysterious and difficult parts of religion; so it is certain, there are not many of the people that can worthily and sufficiently do it themselves; and therefore, although we are not to tell a lie for a good end, and that it cannot be said that God hath by an express law required it, or that it is necessary in the nature of things; yet to some persons it hath put on so many degrees of charity and prudence, and is apt to minister to their superinduced needs, that although it is not a necessary obedience, yet it is a necessary charity; it is not necessary in respect of a positive express commandment, yet it is in order to certain ends, which cannot be so well provided for by any other instrument; it hath, not in it an absolute, but it may have a relative and a superinduced necessity."¹⁶²

But further, Bp. J. Taylor, in a section, "The former doctrine reduced to practice" gives suggestions, how to confess to man; and some of these appear to me of a sort, that they could hardly occur to any one, unless he had experience himself in hearing confessions, or were using the writings of those who had. Thus he directs those who "confess to man" to¹⁶³ "tell our sad story, just as it was in its acting) excepting where the manner of it, and its nature or circumstances, require a veil; and then the sin must not be concealed, nor yet so represented as to keep the first immodesty alive in him that acted it, or to become a new temptation in him that hears it. But this last caution is only of use in our confessions to the minister of holy things."

Then not to implicate any other, as an accomplice, in our confession.

"All our confessions must be accusations of ourselves, and not of others. If we confess to men, then to name another, or by any way to signify or reveal him, is a direct defamation; but unless the naming of the sin do, of itself, declare the assisting party, it is at no hand to be done, or to be inquired into: but if a man hath committed incest, and there is but one person in the world with whom he could commit it; in this case, the confessing his sin does accuse another; but then such a guide of souls is to be chosen, to whom that person is not known; but if, by this or some other expedient, the fame of others be not secured, it is best to confess that thing to God only."¹⁶⁴

Then as to the mode of confessing grave habitual sins.

"But if the penitent person hath been an habitual sinner, in his confession he is to take care, that the minister of religion understand the degrees of his wickedness, the time of his abode in sin, the greatness of his desires, the frequency of his acting them, not told

¹⁶² Practice of Repentance sect. iv. of confession n. 43, Works ix. pp 250, 251. Heber.

¹⁶³ Of Eccles. Penance, Sect. viii. n. 101. T. ix. 293. Heber.

¹⁶⁴ Ib. n. 102.

by numbers, but by general significations of the time, and particular significations of the earnestness of his choice. For this transaction being wholly to the benefit and comfort of his soul, the good man that ministers, must have as perfect moral accounts as he can; but he is not to be reckoned withal by natural numbers and measures, save only so far as they may declare the violence of desires, and the pleasures and choice of the sin. The purpose of this advice is this; that since the transaction of this affair is for counsel and comfort, in order to pardon and the perfections of repentance,—there should be no scruple in the particular circumstances of it, but that it be done heartily and wisely: that is, so as may best serve the ends to which it is designed.”¹⁶⁵

There is also a remarkable suggestion with regard to the exception in our Canon 103, that if a sin be of such sort, that the seal of confession would not be kept, it should not be confessed at all. The exception regarded High Treason. Bp. Taylor accounted rightly “the seal” of such moment, that confession to man should rather be foregone than that the seal should be violated. The difficulty might have been met in another way: for Canon 103 is only permissive, and confessors would rightly risk their lives rather than break the seal. But I think the exception would not have occurred to one who had not Confession, as a living system, before him.

“If the man have committed a great sin, it is a high prudence and an excellent instance of his repentance, that he confess it, declaring the kind of it, if it be of that nature, that the spiritual man *may* conceal it. But if, upon any other account, he be bound to reveal every notice of the fact, let him transact that affair wholly between God and his own soul.”¹⁶⁶

Else he had seen souls, which¹⁶⁷ “have committed some secret facts, of shame and horror, at the remembrance of which they are amazed, of the pardon of which they have no sign, for the expiation of which they use no instrument,—and their sorrow is not holy but very great, and they know not what to do, because they will not ask. I have observed some such: and the only remedy, that was fit to be prescribed to such persons, was to reveal their sin to a spiritual man, and by him to be put into such a state of remedy and comfort, as is proper for their condition. It is certain that many persons have perished for want of counsel and comfort which were ready for them, if they would have confessed their sin; for ‘he that concealeth his sin,’ saith Solomon, ‘he shall not be counselled.’”

Then as to the office of “shame” in confession, he writes, as one scarcely could who did not know it.

“Let no man think it a shame to confess his sins; or if he does, yet let not that shame deter him from it. There is indeed a shame in confession, because nakedness is discovered; but there is also a glory in it, because there is a cure too; there is repentance and amendment.....The shame in confession is a great mortification of the man, ‘and highly punitive of the sin, and such that, unless it hinders the duty, is not to be directly reprov’d; but it must be taken care of, that it be a shame only for the sin, which by how much greater it is, by so much the more Earnestly the man ought to fly to all the means of remedy and instruments of expiation:—and then the greater the shame is, which the sinner suffers,—the more excellent is the repentance, which suffers so much for the extinction Of his sin. But, at no hand, let the shame affright the fluty; but let it be

¹⁶⁵ n. 109. pp. 298, 299.

¹⁶⁶ l.c. § 107. pp. 296, 297.

¹⁶⁷ Ib. p. 297.

remembered, that this confession is but the memory of the shame, which began, when the sin was acted,—and abode but as a handmaid of the guilt, and goes away with it: confession of sins opens them to man, but draws a veil before them, that God will the less behold them....If a man be impatient of the shame here, when it is revealed but to one man, who is also, by all the ties of religion, and by common honesty, obliged to conceal them; the man will be no gainer by refusings to confess, when he shall remember, that sins unconfessed are most commonly unpardoned; and unpardoned sins will; be made public before all angels and all the wise and good men of the world, when their shame shall have nothing to make it tolerable.”¹⁶⁸

His advice also how to teach any to bear the shame, seems that of one, who had carefully watched the fluttering pulse of the penitent.

“When a penitent confesses his sin, the holy man that ministers to his repentance and hears his confession must not, without great cause, lessen the shame of the repenting man; he must directly encourage the duty, but not add confidence to the sinner. For whatsoever directly lessens the shame, lessens also the hatred of sin, and his future caution....But with the shame, the minister of religion is to do, as he is to do with the man’s sorrow; so long as it is a good instrument of repentance, so long is it to be permitted and assisted, but when it becomes irregular, or disposed to evil events, it is to be taken off And so must the shame of the penitent man, when there is danger, lest the man be swallowed up by too much sorrow and shame, or when it is perceived, that the shame alone is a hindrance to the duty. In these cases, if the penitent man can be persuaded, directly and by choice, for ends of piety and religion, to suffer the shame, then let his spirit be supported by other means; but if he cannot, let there be such a confidence wrought in him, which is derived from the circumstances of the person, or the universal calamity and iniquity of man, or the example of sinners like himself, that have willingly undergone yoke of the Lord, or from consideration of the divine mercies, or from the easiness and advantages of the duty; but let nothing be offered to lessen the hatred or the greatness of the sin; lest a temptation to sin hereafter be sowed in the furrows of the present repentance.”¹⁶⁹

Then as to the sins to be confessed, he advises, not only to confess with precision all the heavy sins, but if one of blameless life confesses sins of infirmity, that he should confess whatever characterises them and their frequency, avoiding what are mere worries.

“He that confesseth his sins to the minister of religion, must be sure to express all the great lines of his folly and calamity; that is, all that, by which he may make a competent judgement of the state of his soul. Now if the Man be of a good life, and yet, in his tendency to perfection, is willing to pass under the method and discipline of greater sinners, there is no advice to be given to him, but that he do not curiously tell those lesser irregularities, which vex his peace, rather than discompose his conscience; but what is most remarkable in his infirmities, or the whole state and the greatest marks and instances, and Returns of them, he ought to signify; for else he can serve no Prudent end in his confession.”¹⁷⁰

Bp Taylor closes the subject with earnest words, recommending confession as a

¹⁶⁸ § 104. pp. 294, 296.

¹⁶⁹ l. c.

¹⁷⁰ Ib. p. 296.

preparation for Holy Communion.

“It is a very pious preparation for the holy Sacrament, that we confess our sins to the minister of religion; since it is necessary, that a man be examined, and a self examination was prescribed to the Corinthians in the time of their lapsed discipline, and they must, in destitution of a public minister, do it themselves (but this is in case only of such necessity); the other is better; that is, it is of better order and more advantage, that this part of repentance and holy preparation be performed under the conduct of a spiritual guide. And the reason is pressing. For since it is life or death, that is there administered, and the great dispensation of the keys is in that ministry—it were very well if he that ministers, did know whether the person presented were fit to communicate or no: and if he be not, it is charity to reject him, and charity to assist him that he may be fitted. There are many sad contingencies in the constitution of ecclesiastical affairs, in which every man that needs this help, and would fain make use of it, cannot; but when he can meet with the blessing, it were well, it were more frequently used, and more readily entertained. I end these advices with the words of Origen: ‘He has no pardon, who knows his sin, and confesses it not: but we must confess always, not that the sin always remains, but that for an old sin an unwearied confession is useful and profitable.’ But this is to be understood of a general accusation, or of a confession to God. For in confessions to men, there is no other usefulness of repeating our confessions, excepting where such repetition does aggravate the fault of relapsing and ingratitude, in case the man returns to those sins, for which he hoped, that, before, he did receive a pardon.”¹⁷¹

xix. “The Guide for the penitent” (probably Bp. BRIAN DUPPA’S) was as popular as ‘the Golden Grove,’ and since Bp. Jeremy Taylor’s decease, A. D. 1667, has been always united with it. It was at one time printed as an integral part of the work.¹⁷² In it there is the following advice concerning Confession.¹⁷³

“I. Besides this examination of your conscience, which may be done in secret between God and your own soul, there is great use of holy confession; which, though it be not generally, in all cases, and peremptorily commanded, as if without it no salvation could possibly be had; yet you are advised by the Church, under whose discipline you live, that before you are to receive the holy Sacrament, or when you are visited with any dangerous sickness, if you find any one particular sin, or more, that lies heavy upon you, to disburden yourself of it into the bosom of your confessor, who not only stands between God and you, to pray for you, but hath the power of the keys committed to him, upon your true repentance to absolve you in Christ’s Name from those sins which you have confessed to him.

“II. You are to remember, that you bring along with you to confession, not only unfeigned sorrow and remorse of conscience for sins past, but settled resolutions for the time to come, never to offend in the same kind again; for without this, confession is but a mere pageant; and rather a mockery of God than any effectual means to reconcile to Him.

“III. That having made choice of such a confessor, who is every way qualified that you may trust your soul with him, you are advised plainly and sincerely to open your heart to him; and that laying aside all consideration of any personal weakness in him,

¹⁷¹ n. 110. p. 299.

¹⁷² See the writer’s notice in the Edition of 1843.

¹⁷³ Subjoined to “the Golden Grove,” pp. 158—161. ed. 1843.

you are to look upon him only, as he is a trustee from God and commissioned by Him, as His ministerial deputy, to hear, and judge, and absolve you.

“IV. That the manner of your confession be in an humble posture on your knees, as being made to God rather than man. And for the matter of it, let it be severe and serious; but yet so as it may be without any inordinate anxiety and unnecessary scruples, which serve only to entangle the soul; and instead of setting you free, (which is the benefit to be looked for by confession,) perplex you the more.”

“V. That for the frequency of doing this, you are to consult with your own necessities: and as your physician is not sent for upon every small distemper, which your Own care may rectify; so neither are you obliged upon every failing to be over-scrupulous, or to think it a point of necessity presently to confess it; for the confessor cannot be always present, but your God is, to Whom if you apply yourself with prayer and penitence confessing in His ears alone whatever you have done amiss, and stedfastly believing that through the merits of your Saviour they shall never be imputed to you, you may be confident that your absolution is at that time sealed in heaven, but the comfortable declaration of it you are to look for from the priest.”

xx. Of BP. NICHOLSON it will suffice to extract a few words of Bp. Bull’s Epitaph of him. “Theologus insignis, Episcopus vere primitivus, in concionibus frequens, in scriptis nervosus, legenda scribens, et faciens scribenda; gravitas episcopalis in fronte emicuit.”¹⁷⁴

“And that of this article, ‘forgiveness of sins’ we might have the greater security, God hath committed to His ministers the word of reconciliation, to effect which all that He hath left in their power especially tends.”¹⁷⁵

“4. Lastly, to the Priest’s hand He hath delivered a Key; and the use of it is for the detention and remission of sins, *Whose sins you remit they are remitted.*”

xxi. DR. PIERCE President of Magdalen, afterwards Dean of Exeter, in a sermon preached before Charles ii. at Whitehall A.D. 1661, mentions current arguments against confession among “other excesses and rational disobediences of our times,” “why need we do this or that?” People then argued in the same way against the necessity of going to Church. Preaching on the Purification, he says, that as one instance, he selects the office of confession, because it is amongst Christians a kind of Gospel Purification.

“The duty of Confession from the penitent to the Priest hath been commanded by the Church in the purest tunes of Antiquity; and however misused by the Church of Rome hath been reformed, and not abolished by this of England. But some malcontents there were, who thought our Church not clean enough, unless they might sweep away the pavement; and amongst other things, their stomachs rose against confession. Will not God (say they) be pleased with the acknowledgement of the heart, but must that of the mouth be required also? must we out our souls into the ear of the Priest? Or can we not make it in our closet, but must we have it in the Church too? But I would say to such an English or Scottish Naaman no other thing than was said by the Syrian servant. My brother, or, my sister, suppose our Mother the Church of England had bid thee do some

¹⁷⁴ Memoir prefixed to his Catechism p. vi. Ang. Cath. Ed.

¹⁷⁵ A plain but full Exposition of the Catechism collected out of the best Catechists by William, Lord Bishop of Gloucester, pp. 67. 68.

great thing, wouldest thou not cheerfully have done it without disputes? How much rather when she saith, wash and be clean? That is, ‘confess and be forgiven.’”¹⁷⁶

xxii. The devout BISHOP KEN¹⁷⁷ had been educated at Winchester, and¹⁷⁸ had exhibited in his own person the example of a school-boy dedicating his tender years to the service of God, and lived a virgin life to the end. Having spent five years at the school, he used his joint experience as a boy and as a Fellow of Winchester, when he observed the temptations to which the scholars were exposed, and wrote the “Manual of Prayers for the use of the scholars of Winchester, clergymen, and other devout Christians.” In it, he urges a review of the whole past life in the presence of God, the great Judge, because¹⁷⁹ “there be many sins, some of commission, that you may doubt whether you have forgotten, many that you have quite forgot.” Then having given questions upon all the commandments, and upon the 7th, such as would suggest nothing to one ignorant of any sin, yet would reach the guilty, he suggests,

“In case, PHILOTHEUS, you do find this examination too difficult for you, or are afraid you shall not rightly perform it, or meet with any scruples, or troubles of conscience in the practice of it, I then advise you, as the Church does, to go to one of your Superiors in this place, be your Spiritual Guide, and be not ashamed to unit then your soul freely to him, that, besides his ghostly counsel, you may receive the benefit of Absolution. For though confession of our sins to God is only matter of duty and absolutely necessary, yet confession to our Spiritual Guide also is, by many devout souls, found to be very advantageous to true repentance.”¹⁸⁰

xxiii. KETTLEWELL provides for the “Guide of souls (or the penitent himself, if the sick man is his own examiner)”¹⁸¹ “questions for the penitent, whereby to try and discover the safety of their spiritual state “ both as to belief and obedience. He recites the duties towards God, ourselves, and our neighbours: (under the duties towards ourselves, there are some careful hints as to the 7th commandment, such as would suggest thoughts to the guilty). Among the “Questions concerning our obedience of these laws” is one, there any particular sin amongst all these which lies above the rest, upon your conscience, and for which yet need and desire more particular direction comfort absolution?”

xiv. One can hardly name a name, more esteemed and revered or trusted than Bp. PEARSON. His exposition of the Creed has formed the Theological mind of generation after generation of Theologians. We have all been indebted to him. He was selected as one of the Commissioners of the Savoy Conference. He was consulted as a “moderate divine,” “about the reception of one who had only received” “ordination after a congregational way.” He answers, that “since the individual was no priest or presbyter, he consequently has no power to consecrate the elements,” but also that he could not give him who consulted him, and who is described as “a person of quality” absolution upon

¹⁷⁶ Collection of Sermons p. 242. ed. 1671.

¹⁷⁷ Life of Bp. Ken by a layman p. 62. 1851.

¹⁷⁸ Ib. p. 63.

¹⁷⁹ Ib. pp. 54, 55.

¹⁸⁰ Manual p. 46. A. 1687.

¹⁸¹ Companion for the penitent. Works ii. 348, 351.

his confession in the hour of death. This, of course, implied an expectation, that he might desire it.

“The unfeigned exercise of religion is undoubtedly, as never more necessary, so never so comfortable, as the bed of our sickness, especially upon the approach of death; wherefore the Church hath taken great care that the minister shall attend, and how he shall behave himself in the visitation of the sick for their comfort and advantage. This comfort, I confess, must be taken from you, who are of that persuasion concerning your pastor; for if upon the apprehension of your latter end, you feel your conscience troubled, and being observant of the method prescribed, desire to make a special confession and receive the benefit of absolution, to which end the priest is ordered to use these words: ‘By the authority of Christ committed to me, I absolve thee of all thy sin,’ you will never acquiesce in the absolution, where you acknowledge no commission, nor can you expect any efficacy which dependeth upon the authority.”¹⁸²

xxv. DR. BARROW, entitled in popular opinion, “the learned,” is a very measured writer, so much so, that stateliness gives an appearance of coldness. He has been entitled “the great Barrow,” and any how would not be betrayed into any exaggeration. He is writing on the public penance, but he regards absolution, not as a freeing from the censures of the Church, but as a restoration to a state of grace.

“2. ‘If Christian men, having fallen into sin or failed of duty towards God, do seriously confess their fault, and heartily repent thereof, when the ministers of the Church, in God’s Name and for Christ’s sake, do declare (or pronounce) to them, so doing or so qualified, the pardon of their sin, and absolve them from it; we need not doubt that their sins are really forgiven, and the pardon expressed in words is effectually dispensed unto them.’¹⁸³

“3. Moreover, if persons having committed notorious enormities, adjudged of a deadly and destructive nature, (‘sins unto death,’ S. John calls them,) inconsistent with the state of grace, and scandalous to the Christian profession, are therefore justly secluded from communion of the Church; when, upon submission to the penances enjoined and satisfactory demonstrations of repentance, they are resumed into the bosom of the Church, we may be assured that (according to the Catholic resolution against the Novatians), supposing the repentance true and real, their sins are remitted, and they are restored to a state of grace.

“The Church (to which the public and ordinary dispensations of God’s grace, according to the dispositions and conditions which He hath declared to require in order to men’s becoming capable thereof, is committed,) hath sufficient warrant to receive such persons into a state of grace and reconciliation with God; so that we need not doubt, but whose sins they shall thus remit, shall in effect (according to our Saviour’s word) be remitted; whom they shall thus absolve on earth, they shall be absolved in heaven.”¹⁸⁴

“4. They remit sins *dispensativè*, by consigning pardon in administration of the sacraments, especially in conferring baptism, whereby, duly administered and

¹⁸² “Promiscuous ordinations are destructive to the honour and safety of the Church of England, if they should be allowed in it. Written in a letter to a person of quality. A.D, 1668.” Minor Works T. ii. p. 237. ed. Churton.

¹⁸³ “An Exposition of the Creed,” “The Forgiveness of sins.” Works vol. v. pp. 495, 496. Clar. Pr. 1818.

¹⁸⁴ *Ib.* pp. 496, 497.

undertaken, all sins are washed away, and in the absolving of penitents, wherein grace is exhibited and ratified by imposition hands, the which S. Paul calls *χαριζεσθαι*, to bestow grace or favour upon the penitent.”¹⁸⁵

xxvi. Bp. BURNET is certainly not one, whom one would have expected to have been applied to, to hear confessions. Yet he did hear them habitually. For, in a letter still extant in answer to another Bishop, who enquired “what absolution he used when persons came to confess to him,” and said that he himself “was in the habit of using that in the office for the sick, but wished to know what was Burnet’s practice,” Burnet said, that “in his opinion, either was proper, but that he himself used that in the office for Holy Communion.”¹⁸⁶

xxvii. SCRIVENER mentions as an error imputed to us, “Private confession is to be taken away.” He answers “Not so much as the sectaries say this absolutely;”¹⁸⁷ and in his chapter on repentance,

“I cannot find any seriously and positively denying the lawfulness or usefulness of private or auricular confession to the Priest or Minister. Some indeed very ignorant and no less superstitious persons, are offended at the word Auricular, from the common use of it amongst them whose doctrine and practice have corrupted it.”¹⁸⁸

xxviii. DR. SOUTH asks the question;¹⁸⁹ “Does the Church of England hold auricular or private confession to the Priest as an integral part of repentance and necessary condition of absolution? No; the Church of England denies such confession to be necessary, either *necessitate præcepti*, as enjoined by any law or command of God; or *necessitate medii*, as a necessary means of pardon or remission of sins; and consequently rejects it as a snare and a burden, groundlessly and tyrannically imposed upon the Church.

“But so much of private confession as may be of spiritual use for the disburthening of a troubled conscience, unable of itself to master or grapple with its own doubts, by imparting them to some knowing, discreet, spiritual person, for his advice and resolution about them; so much, I confess, the Church of England does approve, advise, and allow of. I say, it does advise it, and that as a sovereign expedient, proper in the nature and reason of the thing, for the satisfaction of persons otherwise unable to satisfy themselves, but by no means does it enjoin it as a duty equally and universally required of all.”

xxix. Dr. ISHAM’S “Daily Office for the sick”¹⁹⁰ was (to judge from its repeated editions) a popular book of devotions at the close of the 17th century. Dr. Isham urges, that the Church exhorts to special confession in sickness, if their conscience be troubled

¹⁸⁵ Power of the Keys Ib. p. 206.

¹⁸⁶ J. D. Chambers Esq., a lawyer of exact mind, says, “I saw in a collection of autographs a letter from Bp. Burnet, signed by him, to another Bishop whose name was not stated,” to this effect. Church and the World. 2nd Series p. 393.

¹⁸⁷ A course of Divinity. The Entrance. Harpsfield’s Obj. 10.

¹⁸⁸ Ib. B. i. P. i. c. 38. p. 182.

¹⁸⁹ Sermon lxi. T. iv. p. 211. ed. Clar. Press.

¹⁹⁰ Compiled out of H. S. and the Liturgy, Directions § v. p. 193. A. 1694.

with any weighty matter; he bids the sick man, if truly penitent, to look upon the priest, who declares the absolution, as speaking from God on the ground of “our Blessed Saviour’s own words promise. (S. John xx. S. Matt, xviii.)”

“If the sick person feels his conscience troubled with any weighty matter, he is exhorted by the Church make a special confession of his sins to the minister that visits him; and then having testified his hearty repentance he is to desire Absolution, and to receive it in the Form (the Church with all possible humility and thankfulness looking upon the priest that declares it, as speaking God, Who gave this Authority to His Church and to the pastors of it: *Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them;*’ and *whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.*’ However, since the ministerial power cannot absolve any whom God doth not absolve the infirm Christian is to remember, that he can have advantage by this Absolution, but upon the condition i his sound and sincere repentance, and by consequence is earnestly to frame himself to such a contrition.”

He adds, moreover, that, although our Church only presses confession in the case of deeper sin, its apparent mind is that it ought to be used by many who neglect it.

“It is fit also for him to observe, that though on Church presseth particular confession to a Priest, only when the conscience is disquieted with sins of deeper malignity, yet it doth not discountenance the more frequent use of it; and this, too, in so comprehensive a case to take in great numbers that neglect it.”

xxx. BISHOP WILSON’S popular title, “the Apostolic,” will be a guarantee for the soundness of his teaching.

In his “Instructions for the Clergy” he provides a form for “Examination of the sick person’s conscience,”¹⁹¹ in which there are questions under all the commandments, in no other than Scripture language, yet unveiled. This, however, is not the confession; but only a preparation for it, for he sums up;

“And now I will leave you for a while to God and to your own conscience; beseeching Him to discover to you the charge that is against you; that you may know and confess and bewail and abhor the errors of your life past; that your sins may be done away by His mercy, and your pardon sealed in heaven, before you go hence and be no more seen.”

Then he explains the relation of our Lord’s office and that which He has committed to us, as “the true way to magnify the power of the keys.”

“Our Lord having purchased the forgiveness of sins for all mankind, He hath committed the ministry of reconciliation to us: that, having brought men to repentance, we may, in Christ’s name and in the power of Christ, pronounce their pardon.¹⁹²

“And this will be the true way to magnify the power of the Keys, which is so little understood or so much despised; namely to bring as many as possibly we can to Repentance, that we may have more frequent occasions of sealing penitents’ pardon by our ministry.”

Then he advises how to instruct the uninstructed sick thereon.

“And now if the sick person has been so dealt with, as to be truly sensible of his sinful condition, he should then be instructed in the nature and benefit of confession (at

¹⁹¹ Parochialia, or Instructions to the Clergy, Works, vii. 65. ed. Keble.

¹⁹² *Ib.* p. 68.

least of such sins as do trouble his conscience,) and of absolution. For instance, he should be told, that as, under the law of Moses, God made His priests the judges of leprosy,—even so under the Gospel He has given His priests authority to judge of sin, which is the leprosy of the soul. He has given them rules to judge by, with authority pronounce their pardon, if they find them qualified. For this is their commission from Christ’s own mouth, ‘Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them.’”¹⁹³

Then, once more, he suggests questions to test and elicit real penitence, and so closes this part;

“Every Christian, whose life has been in the main blameable, and whose repentance has been thus particularly examined, and who has given a satisfactory answer to these questions, ought not to leave the world without the benefit, of absolution, which he should be earnestly pressed to desire, and exhorted to dispose himself to receive, as the Church has appointed, with all possible humility and thankfulness.”¹⁹⁴

In a series of sermons, “On the Creed put in practice,” when he comes to the Article “on the Forgiveness of sins,” after a brief exhortation to repentance, he adds,

“And if my sins are such as give me great disturbance of mind, I will not only confess them to God, but I will apply to some one of those pastors, whom God has appointed to be the ministers of reconciliation betwixt God and man: to him I will open my case and my grief; I will take his ghostly counsel and directions; and when he judges my repentance to be sincere, according to the rules of the Gospel, I will beg of him to give me absolution. For sure, sure those words of Jesus Christ were not so often repeated to no purpose, ‘Whosoever sins ye remit, we remitted unto them.’ I will therefore faithfully believe, that it will be unto me according to this word.”¹⁹⁵

On S. James v. 15, he presupposes that confession of sins preceded the forgiveness.

“*And the prayer of faith shall save the sick: and the Lord shall raise him up, and if he hath committed sins, (αφεθησεται αυτω), he shall be absolved, i.e. upon his confession.*”¹⁹⁶

In his “Maxims of piety and morality” he sets down as addressed to the Clergy;

“[Ad Clerum]. Qualifications of a *good Confessor*.—A blameless life. Of an inviolable secrecy, a sweet behaviour to allure and to comfort sinners. Courage to reprove and prudence to apply fit remedies to troubled consciences, and to let them know that God respects sincerity of heart above all things.”¹⁹⁷

Here again he uses the illustration of the Levitical law as to leprosy, to reconcile God’s sole power of forgiveness and man’s delegated power of remission.

Auricular Confession. Tis certainly true, *none can forgive sins but God only.* S. Mark ii. 7. And yet those are not vain words—*Whose sins ye remit, they are remitted.* S. John xx. 23.¹⁹⁸

These Scriptures are easily reconciled by this other instance out of these Holy Records—The leper under the law (Lev. xiii. 6) was healed by God only; the Priests

¹⁹³ Ib. p. 69.

¹⁹⁴ Ib. p. 70.

¹⁹⁵ Serm. xxxvi. Works, i.; 409. ed. Keble.

¹⁹⁶ Sacra Privata, Works, v. 35, 36 Ib.

¹⁹⁷ Maxims. n. 52. Works v. p. 532. ed. Keble.

¹⁹⁸ Ib. n. 78. Ib. p. 540.

alone could pronounce him clean; he had certain rules given him, by which he was to go; if he neglected them, he acted presumptuously.—If he followed them, he had authority to pronounce him clean, and as such he was received into the congregation, a type of heaven. Apply this to the *Ministry of Absolution*. We are to enquire diligently into the motives, steps, signs, fruits of repentance. If we find them to be such as the Gospel requires, We declare them pardoned. If not, we pronounce them uncle and not fit for the Kingdom of heaven.—To His people *being penitent*, of which the Priest is appointed the judge—by *Gospel rules*, and he would mightily abuse his power, if he should pronounce one penitent, who has been persuaded to tell his faults, without considering seriously how to leave them, and purposing sincerely to do so. And certainly the best way to satisfy one's conscience whether we are truly penitent, is for a while to try, whether we keep up sincerely to our resolutions of forsaking any sin.”

xxx. Bishop STEARNE'S Treatise of the Visitation of the sick, was, in the memory of some yet living, a part book put, by a sort of authority, into our hands in preparation for Holy Orders, “The Clergyman's Instructor.”¹⁹⁹ Bp. Stearne, an Irish Bishop, published it in Latin in the last year of the 17th century. It came recommended us, early in this 19th. It was in the collection of Treatises put into all our hands, as candidates for Holy Orders. In it, he suggests ways and motives, whereby to induce a sic man to confess the sins, which ought to be revealed, that he may be rightly advised, whether he is ashamed to say what he was not ashamed to commit, or that the Confessor would out of malice or culpable levity reveal to other what was confided to him, or might conceive a bad opinion of him. He suggests remedies to these fears, and makes the parish priest give the advice, ‘Choose whom you will as Confessor, but out of love I warn you, not to conceal from him, what unless he knows, you can profit little by his counsel.’

The whole advice occupies eighteen pages in the original Latin.

xxxii. BISHOP HORNE, in a Sermon preached before the University of Oxford,²⁰⁰ after a very careful statement of the relative offices of Christ and the holy Spirit: the Giver and the gifts; distinguishes between the measure of those gifts, as distributed to each: 1stly the Apostolical, or that conferred on the Apostles; 2ndly the Ecclesiastical, or that continued on to their successors by the laying on of hands;

“The second measure of grace is the ecclesiastical measure, or that which is given to the ordinary ministry for the standing government and continual edification of the Church. This likewise is the gift of Christ, He being the fountain-head of all principality and power, and it is conferred by the Spirit, Who only commissions men to be the representatives of Christ, and to act in His name....²⁰¹

“When Christ, after His resurrection, appointed His Apostles to the work of the ministry, He breathed on them, and said, ‘Receive ye the Holy Ghost.’ The next Words shew, for what purpose the Spirit was there given by His breathing on them: ‘Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted; and whosoever sins ye retain they are retained.’ The Apostles afterwards ordained ‘by the laying on of hands,’ as their successors have done, and do to this day, saying, after the example and by the authority

¹⁹⁹ p. 418. ed. 1807.

²⁰⁰ Whit-Tuesday, 1757.

²⁰¹ Discourse xviii. on Eph. iv, 7. T. i. p. 342.

their great Lord and Master, 'Receive thou the Holy Ghost: whosoever sins thou dost remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins thou dost retain, they are retained.'

"The third measure of the gift of Christ is that" give he says, "for the personal sanctification of individuals." Here first in order stands regeneration.

"The regenerate spirit of a Christian, while it is (as Peter calls it) a babe in Christ, must be fed with the milk of the Word; when it is more grown in grace, with the strong meat of its salutary doctrines; when it is infirm, it must be strengthened by the comforts of its promises; and when sick, or wounded by sin, it must be recovered and restored by godly counsel and wholesome discipline, *by penance and absolution*, by the medicines of the Word and Sacraments, as duly and properly administered in the Church by the lawfully and regularly appointed delegates and representatives of the Physician of souls."

"Penance and absolution," are, in Bp. Horne's belief, for those who need it, part of the gift of Christ for the personal sanctification of individuals.

xxxiii. BISHOP PHILLPOTTS, it is known, from the legal character of his mind, was one, who would construe any document with strict exactness. Confession to man was, in his early days, although used, exceptional. He, probably, never either made or heard a confession. In speaking then of the supposed disadvantage of frequent confession, he was speaking of that, of which, however acute, he had no *practical* experience. Yet with his well-known precision of mind, while disadvising the practice, he saw that it was not forbidden by the Church of England, nay that we, the Clergy, could not, if asked, refuse to hear *habitual* confessions:²⁰²

"Persons may differ as to the expediency of such a practice; and for myself, hesitate not to say that in my Judgement, the *habit* of going to confession without some special reason, is likely to produce very grave mischief in many cases—to impair the healthy tone of a Christian conscience, just as constant and unnecessary recourse to medicine weakens the constitution of the body. But this is a matter which the Church leaves open to the discretion of its members, both lay and clerical; and I disclaim the right of interfering with it, beyond saying, as I again say, to my clergy, that I disapprove it.²⁰³ After all, however, the clergy have in truth much less liberty in the matter than the laity. They may discourage (as I think our Church plainly discourages), but I do not think they can refuse, the habitual application to them to receive confession; and those who discourage it in earnest, will rarely be much troubled.—Speaking generally, however, I believe that there is very little danger, that, in this country and in these times, there will be any excessive tendency to seek the benefit of absolution. There is much more danger of its not being sought, even when, with God's blessing, it would be most useful.²⁰⁴ To use an old illustration, the man who in these days²⁰⁵ warns his neighbour against the

²⁰² Confession and Absolution; a letter to the Dean of Exeter 1852. p. 24, 25.

²⁰³ Again, while continuing to express his opinion, that the Church of England discourages habitual confession, he says in a letter to one who had been accused to him; "As I do not think that the Church of England prohibits your receiving to confession those who seek it as an habitual Practice, I do not presume to prohibit your doing so." Letter to G. R. Prynne p. 43. To myself, on explaining that the *habitual* confessions which I heard in his diocese still had reference to Holy Communion, he expressed himself satisfied.

²⁰⁴ The Italics are the Editor's.

²⁰⁵ A. 1852.

usurpation of priestly power in England, must be one who would, with equal wisdom, have cried, ‘Fire! Fire!’ at the Deluge.”

Again, Bp. Phillpotts puts the question directly,²⁰⁶ “Now, is the receiving the secret, auricular (for the words are in this instance of the same import) confession of the sins of the dying penitent, or of one who is withheld from the Lord’s Table by fear of his unfitness to present himself is the receiving of such confession one of the ministration of Christ’s ministers? Our Church says that it is: you as a high officer in that Church, have again and again declared that you unfeignedly believe it so to be. You must then, on your own principle, joyfully and thankfully acknowledge that Christ is with His minister in receiving such confession, and in pronouncing thereupon the Church’s solemn form of absolution: Our Lord Jesus Christ &c.”

Again, in answer to the imputation that absolution was “a Popish figment” left by the Reformers, against their better judgement:

“For, after all, the power of forgiving and retaining sin left by our Lord to His Church, or rather exercised Himself in His Church through His ministers, is one, in which, properly understood, the people are far more interested than the ministers themselves. Yet we commonly hear it assailed as mere priestcraft, a remnant of Popery (‘a Popish figment,’ is, I believe, the stock description of it in platform oratory), which our Reformers suffered remain, in condescension to the prejudices of the people, contrary to their own better judgement. How truly is said, may be seen on reference to the deliberate teaching of the Reformers in the Homily of ‘Common Prayer and Sacraments,’ where it is expressly said, that *absolution hath the promise of forgiveness of sins*—yet, by the express word of the New Testament, it hath not this promise annexed and tied to the visible sign, which is imposition of hands, and *therefore* (because it hath not a visible sign, though it ‘hath the promise of forgiveness of sins’) Absolution is no *such* Sacrament, as Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are.”²⁰⁷

Again, in regard to the solution, which supposes the absolution to refer to Ecclesiastical censures:

“But I dwell not on the matter of ecclesiastical censure; for it is not that, with which we are immediately, or at least principally concerned. The matter really in question is, the doctrine of our Church respecting Absolution, as it is carried out in one of its highest and most formal acts—the conferring of Holy Orders. For our church ordains Priests (to whom, *as such*, it gives no ‘power to inflict or to remove Ecclesiastical Censures’) by giving to them our Lord’s commission in the words of your text, ‘Receive ye the Holy Ghost for the office and Work of a Priest in the church of God. Whose sins *thou dost forgive*, they are forgiven,’ &c. And if we could doubt the meaning of the Church in thus applying our Lord’s Commission to *Priests*, it would be made plain beyond the possibility of cavil, by looking at the manner in which the Priest is authorised and required to exercise his power of ‘Order,’ in the various duties and offices which the Church has assigned to him. First, having said that ‘Almighty hath given power and commandment &c. . . . sins’ he proceeds to ‘declare and pronounce’ that God then ‘pardoneth and absolveth &c.’ Again, the priest, before he administers the Holy Communion, invokes God’s pardon on those who have acknowledged and bewailed their manifold *sins* before Him. Again, the priest gives or refuses Absolution to those who

²⁰⁶ Letter &c. p. 14.

²⁰⁷ Letter, p. 32.

open their grief to him in secret, asking special confession of the *sins* which trouble them in order to their obtaining the benefit of Absolution his hands—whether in preparation for the Holy Communion, or at the visitation of them being sick; in the latter case, the priest, having invoked the pardon of our Jesus Christ Who hath left power to His Church to absolve all *sinner*s who truly repent and believe in Him, says ‘By His authority committed to me, I absolve thee from all sins, in the Name &c.’”²⁰⁸

“Such, according to the plain teaching of our Church, is the commission of Priests; such the power given to them—the object of that power is, I repeat, *sins*. To deny, therefore (as you deny), that this Commission confers a power ‘to absolve men from the future penalties of sin’—and to say (as you say), that it only constitutes ‘judges in ritual matters, if need be, to inflict or remove Ecclesiastic censures,’ is simply to contradict your Church, speaking not only in its Homily, but in the Book of Common Prayer and the Ordinal, of which you have again and again solemnly ‘declared your unfeigned assent and consent to all and everything contained therein.’”

Again,—

“Now we have seen that a main part of our Lord’s mission relates to the forgiveness of sins. When therefore He declared, ‘that as the Father hath sent’ Him, even so He sends the Apostles, He gave to His apostles His own delegated power of forgiving sins. And when He breathed on them, and said, ‘Receive ye the Holy Ghost,’ He gave to them from Himself that same Spirit, by Whom the power of forgiveness of sins was in Himself. And therefore having thus conferred upon them the power, He in express terms promised to be with them in the exercise of it, inasmuch as it is His own power continued in them, through them to their successors, ‘even unto the end of the world’ ‘Whosoever sins ye remit &c;’ they are and retained by Me, not you, by My using you My ministers, who are to exercise My power not your own, and exercise it in My Name.”²⁰⁹

“This, which is the plain, direct, grammatical construction of the passage, sufficiently disposes of *the argumentum ad invidiam*, which is so commonly used against the notion “that the Christian Minister claims to forgive or retain sins. It is not he, that forgives or retains, but Christ; he only has authority to speak the words of Christ; if therefore he speak not Christ’s words, pronounces not according to Christ’s judgement, he speaks what is naught, and what he is guilty before God for speaking, in such measure of guilt, as his erring speech has been caused by presumption or negligence, in delivering the sentence of Christ.”

Bp. Phillpotts almost ridicules the imputation which has been so rife of late, as if the confessional involved a diseased curiosity as to those sins, which have to be treated with most tenderness, and the greatest delicacy and reserve, consistent with truthfulness:

“Here then is a very wide field of doubt and perplexity—less, I believe, in respect to that commandment, which is usually spoken of, as if it were the only, or *the favourite* matter of the confessional—the seventh—than any other, most of the offences against it are too certain, to admit of any doubt whatever in the mind of an ordinarily informed Christian.”²¹⁰

xxxiv. Bp. MOBERLY cautions as to “the practice of *continual* confession to a

²⁰⁸ Letter pp. 33, 34, 35.

²⁰⁹ Letter, p. 29, 30.

²¹⁰ Letter p. 31.

priest and the craving of *continual* absolution at his hands,—much more the habit of seeking *continual* ‘direction’ (as it is called) of conscience from him.” Of these he says, “I cannot doubt that it has a distinctly enfeebling effect upon the personal strength with which a Christian ought to walk before God and order his own steps according to His law.” He does not, however, say, how much he includes under the expression which he uses, of ‘*continual* confession’ and ‘*continual* absolution.’ The subject of ‘direction’ (of which hereafter) is altogether distinct, and is at most only incidentally connected with confession. But every gift of God committed to man has its perils by reason of human infirmity; whether as confessing individually, priests as well as people, one’s sins, or receiving confessions, as priests, we are indebted for any cautions in a case “where disuse [Bp. Moberly adds, ‘and much past corruption’] and the obvious liability of various kinds of danger, and I will add, the scantiness of special and particular directions from authority, embarrass the exercise of a real, and in its own place, a most precious and sacred power.”²¹¹

But the question, which is now so wildly agitated, is not as to any abuse in the exercise of what Bp. Moberly rightly calls, “a real, most precious, and sacred power, but as to the power itself or any use of it. And on this Bp. Moberly is distinct;

“Those who are in notorious sin, whereby the congregation is offended, are to be repelled from communion and not re-admitted to it, until restored by due absolution upon repentance; and those who are in such distress mind from the burthen of secret sin as to feel themselves unfit to communicate, and really, though without the knowledge of others, outside for the present of the pale of God’s people are by the ministry of God’s Holy Word to receive from the Priest ‘the benefit of absolution, together with ghostly counsel and advice, to the quieting of their conscience, and avoiding of all scruple and doubtfulness.’²¹²

“In the time of heavy and dangerous sickness,—in time when death seems to be impending, when the conscience is likely to be burdened with weighty matters, lightly regarded, perhaps hardly remembered at all, in the days of health and strength; when bodily and mental powers are enfeebled, and the heart is tempted to sink down and despair under the prospect of appearing immediately in the presence of the Most Holy God with all its sins upon it—is the blessed comfort of the solemn confession to God, in the presence of His priest, and the tender administration of God’s Holy Word and promise, crowned by the audible words of authorized and express absolution, not to be refused to the afflicted and dying sinner, humbly heartily desiring it? Oh! let no shrinking from the honest and faithful use of the Divinely-descended powers that came to the Church and to her priests from the holy Words and Breath of Christ, let no base fears of worldly objection or scorn lead a priest of God to grudge to his dying brother the clear, outspoken, ringing words of holy solution, which the Church has put into his mouth, which sad sinner humbly and heartily craves, which his faithful, full Confession has earned. Do not mock the dying patient by reminding him that he too is a physician. Do cheat the broken-hearted penitent by telling him that he is a priest himself. God has provided an express comfort for him in his extremity of distress. God has given to you, *and to none but you*, the very anodyne for his poor soul’s pain. You are cruel, you are faithless, you are untrue to your holy calling and duty, if, out of fear of man, you shrink

²¹¹ Bampton Lectures Lect. vii. p. 233.

²¹² *Ib.* pp. 225—227.

from using it.”

xxxv. I will add one more name, for the undying love and reverence, borne towards him by hearts, whose inner life, by the grace of God, he deepened; JOHN KEBLE.

He wrote, in heaviness of heart, as a parish-priest, “I go on working in the dark, and in the dark it will until the rule of systematic confession is received in our Church.... They do not, they cannot, unless they were tried as we are, form an adequate notion, how absolutely we are in our parishes like people whose lantern has blown out, and who are feeling their way, and continually stepping in puddles and splotches of mud, which they think are dry stones.”²¹³

It was to him a ground of recommendation of a Curate that one had been dismissed from a London Curacy the Bishop, for preaching a sermon on confession. “I think,”²¹⁴ he says, “if I wanted a Curate, I should inquire about him, not of course make him an offer at once, try to ascertain through others, whether he was a good discreet man, and if he were, give him a preference. Who ever can discreetly and effectually bring in confession, will do, I should think, one of the best things for this poor Church, as she is at present.”

To one who had relapsed into deadly sin he express his thankfulness, that he had “had the heart to confess” and expresses his conviction that “*regular* confession” (the italics are J. K.’s) would be his best help;

“Indeed I am very sorry for you, but I must not lose a t in beseeching you not to despair, but to go on courageously in the way of penitence, on which, by God’s grace, you have entered. I feel sure that as the evil spirit must have rejoiced in your fall (no doubt he was especially busy with you, those who are making any kind of effort in the way of goodness must always expect to find him so), so the good Angels rejoiced, and I trust, are still rejoicing, at your having the heart to confess.”.....²¹⁵

“I am persuaded that in most cases (and yours seems no exception,) *regular* confession, and not occasional only, be found the best help, by way both of precaution remedy. It was partly with this view that I mention to you Mr. ———, whom I suppose to be a most discreet and charitable director. But I hope you will understand that I am quite at your service, should you prefer opening your grief to me, Providence having somehow brought us together.”

And then, having given hints how “to prepare for what called ‘general confession,’” he adds, “Then when a opportunity comes, you may pour it all out into your loving Lord’s ear, through some one of His unworthy Priests, and be by Him, through the Priest’s mouth, so fully absolved, that the sins, if not returned to, shall be no more mentioned unto you, and you may with humble confidence communicate as often as ever you can reverently draw near.

“Pray consider this, and with earnest prayer. I cannot but hope that courage will be given you to try this remedy, as it must be, and to persevere in it. You need nave to wait long, as, if you prefer Mr. ——— (which, on many accounts, I should be glad of), you might him at any time. The practice once begun, I trust in great goodness, would go

²¹³ Letter dated, on the Purification 1842. Coleridge, Memoir of John Keble p. 302. Also in Wilson’s Selection from his letters, Lett. xix.

²¹⁴ Letter xx, p, 41. ed. Wilson.

²¹⁵ Ib. xlvii. p. 95, 96.

on, and do you great good, general confession need not be repeated, though changed your director, unless you wished it.²¹⁶

“May He, Who can, forgive and bless you.”

And in another letter;²¹⁷ “be not too scrupulous in setting down things, nor yet too general, but take some one more as specimens in any kind which may have become habitual, and describe the frequency of the habit, if can, by the number of sins in a given time; and the de by some aggravating circumstances, such as your conscience most reproaches you for, and He Who is merciful will accept it, if fairly so intended, for a full confession, you write is best written in some kind of cypher or abbreviation, lest it be lost and do harm. Do it as a religious exercise, as in God’s presence, and a good deal your knees. Being thus set down as you may remember it, it will save you the trouble of recollection when come to confess, and you will be more at leisure for pure contrition.

“On the whole matter you will find good directions in Bishop Taylor’s ‘Holy Dying,’ and ‘Golden Grove;’ also in Kettlewell’s ‘Companion to the Penitent.’

“May God and all good Angels be with you in good work.”

And at the close of an earnest letter “to the parent an illegitimate child,”

“If, according to our Saviour’s and the Church’s direction, you make use of me or any other clergyman to advise you in the difficult work of steady repentance, are aware, of course, that any clergyman is bound to keep people’s secrets so applying to him.”²¹⁸

To a lady, at a Distance, wishing to write some account of her faults;²¹⁹

About confessing again, you must judge for yourself, may of course be written, but Absolution must be in person. We can easily manage it, if you wish.”²²⁰

Having answered the criticisms of Dr. Perowne as myself personally, I ought to say, that with the exception of his declamations against frequent confession, which probably he practically knows nothing, (for as Phillpotts remarked with his usual acuteness, “those who discourage frequent confession in earnest, will rarely much troubled”) he acknowledges all, for which I have myself ever contended.

Dr. Perowne writes against those who hear confessions rather than against confession itself. He accuses unjustly those who hear them, of “trying as far as possible to assimilate the Church of England to the Church of Rome.”

“This,” he says, “has been avowed again and again by the leaders of the movement themselves.” Whom he means by those leaders, I know not, his only instance being our friend Hurrell Froude, who thought the Reformation ill-managed, without denying that a reformation was needed. The Church of England has never professed to be infallible. Bp. Ridley appealed to his former chaplain that he had “misliked some things,” “sudden changes without substantial and necessary cause.”²²¹ We may acquiesce thankfully in the results, as shewn in our Prayer-book, as a whole; and yet wish that the vine had not been shaken so violently. Every body wishes that some things been done otherwise, though in opposite directions.

The words of the pious George Herbert have long be in the mouths of those who

²¹⁶ Ib. p. 97.

²¹⁷ Letter xlvi. p. 98.

²¹⁸ Letter lxxiv. p. 140.

²¹⁹ i. e. if the same, to whom Letter lxxxvi. p.159 was written.

²²⁰ Letter lxxxix. p. 164.

²²¹ Fathers of the Eng. Ch. iv. 233.

loved the Church of without offence to others:

“The second temple could not reach the first;
And the first Reformation never durst
Compare with ancient times and purer years,
But in the Jews and us deserveth tears.”²²²

The devout Bishop Andrewes prayed continually,

“for the British Church,
the supply of what is wanting in it,
the strengthening of what remains in it.”²²³

His prayers have been repeated without rebuke by man! thousand hearts and voices.

“But no part of the movement” (Dr. Perowne preached to his congregation at Llandaff) “has been regarded with more suspicion and aversion (“and I think justly” adds) than the attempt to formulate in our Church a system of confession and absolution differing in no essential particulars from that practised in the Church of Rome.”²²⁴

I have said already that those first engaged in this movement, “formulated” nothing, initiated nothing. Consciences were shaken; there was a stern preaching of repentance. Men came, like the people to S. John Baptist, to confess their sins, knowing that our Lord had left power to His priests to pronounce His absolving word. What would our accusers have had us do? Would they not have had us speak *His* healing Word, Whose “word is with power?” Would they have had us bid them, “go, heal yourselves,” like the shepherds of Israel, on whom God pronounces woe, and says, “The diseased have ye not healed, bound up that which was broken, nor sought that which was lost.” But if confessions are heard at all, there no room for “formulating.” In any confession and absolution, there are two parties, the party who confesses, and the priest, who hears the confession. The rules for confession are simple, and must be the same everywhere. One way of confessing, in itself, is better than another, but each must confess in the way natural to each; interruptions do but disturb the penitent. The conditions are religious and spiritual, not technical, or to be taught by art; simplicity, humility, purity, faithfulness, plainness, discretion, modesty, integrity, tearfulness, continuousness, courage, self-accusation, readiness to obey, are the qualities which are proverbial among Roman writers.²²⁵ The absolution was put into our mouths by our Church. There remain only the penances given. These are everywhere now some light remedial practice, such (as Bishop Phillpotts described them) as might be “helps against evil habits for the future, remedies of some besetting sin, instruments, in short, of spiritual discipline.”²²⁶ Plainly those who, as yet, have not experience, might gain much from the wise and experienced. A physician of the body might well ask one older who had more experience, “What remedies have you found useful under such and such symptoms?” People may object to the use of

²²² The Temple; The Church militant p. 243.

²²³ Private devotion The second Day p. 51. ed. 1848.

²²⁴ Sermon n. 1.

²²⁵ See below.

²²⁶ Letter to the Dean of Exeter. p. 24.

confession; but if it is used at all (and it was and is forced upon us, if we would minister to the souls for whom Jesus shed His Precious Blood) no one can seriously think that should give less wise advice if we studied the experiences those who had most thoughtfully, attentively, and lovingly watched the human heart, as S. Francis de Sales, or S. Philip Néri or S. Charles Borromeo. There is wisdom required, to which sin to direct a penitent's chief attention what means of victory to suggest to those who fall back into the same sins, or are guilty of habitual sin, or have difficulty in breaking off from a proximate occasion of sin. Those of experience may give advice, for which we well be grateful, and which has nothing to do with controversy. It was in such matters, for which, now many years ago, I found the advice of the lovers of souls in the Manual specially useful to myself in hearing confessions.

However, whatever Dr. Perowne may think of any us, he concedes frankly all which I wish.

“For my own part, I think it would be vain to deny that the Church of England does, in certain cases, sanction both private confession and individual absolution. I will go further, and say that I believe she has shewn the truest wisdom and the truest tenderness in permitting both the one and the other; and if nothing more were asserted than this, I should not think it worth while to dispute the assertion. I should feel that it must be left very largely to the discretion of each individual clergyman, how far he considered it wise in particular cases to encourage confession. I should think any clergyman guilty of neglect of duty and disregard of his office, if he refused to give ghostly counsel and the benefit of absolution to those who were burdened by their consciences, and who heartily and humbly desired it, in order to be admitted to the Holy Communion, or on a bed of sickness.”²²⁷

The chief, probably, of these authorities have, in one or other, been brought before people's minds during a series of years.²²⁸ The present collection will probably

²²⁷ Sermon p. 8.

²²⁸ The earliest Catena was (if I recollect right) upon this and some other subjects, by an Undergraduate, who wished to find himself supported by authority, in 1841: in 1842, The Rev. (now Bp.) C. Wordsworth made a very full Catena in an Appendix to a sermon, which he preached in his then office of under-master of Winchester: his chief object was the restoration of discipline; so the authorities on discipline and private confession were mixed together. I myself added some in the notes on my second sermon, “The entire absolution of the penitent,” Dr. (afterwards Bp.) Jeune having preached against my first. The Rev. W. Maskell, in a book which attracted a good deal of attention, “The doctrine of absolution,” 1849, added some of the Articles of Enquiry in the 17th century, the Irish Canons, and Abp. Wake, with other well-known writers, quoted for a different purpose in previous Collections, with which he was probably unacquainted; some I added or repeated in my letter to Mr. Richards, “The Church leaves her children free to whom to open their grief,” (Letter and Appendix), and my Letter to the Bishop of London. A good many more authorities were added by the Rev. W. Cooke in an Appendix to his work “The power of the priesthood” (1858,); some were gleaned by Rev. J. C. Chambers in “the Church and the World” 2nd series 1867. Mr. Cooke added more authorities in his Appendix of 1874. To him I find that I am indebted for directing my attention to the great names of Mede, Bishop Sanderson, Bishop Berkeley, as well as to the Minor works of the great Bishop Pearson, and Bishop Bayly; as also to Dean Turner, Becon, Hakewil, Mason, Scrivener, Chillingworth. Mr. Cooke has other quotations from W. Perkins (a Calvinistic writer), King James I, Bishop Downname, The whole Duty of man; Dr. Littleton (Sermon before the Royal Family 1675); “The plausible argument of a Romish priest from Scripture, answered by an English Protestant,” described in the title page as “seasonable and useful for all Protestant families;” “The Faith and Practice of a Church of England man,” 1688, (with the imprimatur of the Archbishop of Canterbury), Dean Brough,

hare the fate of its predecessors, be looked at, cast aside forgotten. For what people do not care for, or wish it had not been written, on the side to which they are posed, they contrive speedily to forget. It is an encumbrance, which they bundle out of sight as fast as they can. It was an acute saying of Archbishop Whateley, “many wish to have truth on their side, but few wish to be on the side of truth.” Nevertheless I thought it a work of charity to bring before those who *would* hear, some portion of evidence, that the very chief of our divines have recognise Confession and Absolution as a provision of our for the healing of our infirmities, and the cure of diseases which might otherwise fester and bring death upon soul.

It may, any how, startle some, that what they have be ignorantly declaiming against, as undermining the system of the Church of England, has been maintained by the most zealous of her defenders; that what they have condemned, as Roman, has been claimed by controversialist of ours against Rome; that what they have spoken against as injurious to the soul, and interfering between it and its Redeemer, has been valued by some who lived in close union with Him. Some may be healthfully ashamed that they have declaimed against the practice as unprotestant, when it is advocated in all the Lutheran formulas: some, that they declaimed against it as undermining the Reformation, seeing that it was advocated by Reformers such Cranmer, Ridley and Latimer: some, who have been pressing upon the Bishops to put down it and us, may checked in their eagerness when they see that 4 Archbishops and 21 Bishops, of repute as writers, have more or less strongly advocated it; that 10 Bishops or more in their Visitation Articles enquired whether their Clergy had invited their people to confession: some of intellect may perhaps pause, as if they *may* have been mistaken—they cannot pooh pooh it, when they see such as Berkeley, Hooker, Sanderson, Barrow, Pearson, them; some of unction may hesitate, when they see as Bishops Hall, Andrewes, Ken, J. Taylor, Wilson, i Herbert, on the other side: some, who conscientiously “The Bible and the Bible only,” even while their tradition overrides the plain teaching of the Bible, may be startled to see “the immortal Chillingworth” (as some need to call him) even vehemently inviting to, what they themselves vehemently condemn,

There are two other subjects, upon which it may be well gay a few words; as they are the most frequent topics with those who, seeing to a certain extent that the Church of England does, in certain cases, recommend confession, would minimise its use. The one relates to the frequency confession itself, which they suppose the Church of England to allow: the other, ‘direction,’ is in itself wholly independent of confession.

If confession is once admitted, as desirable in some cases, on the sick bed, it manifestly cannot be confined to it. No one could seriously think that a sin, which haunted the conscience, must, as a matter of duty and of loyalty to the English Church, remain there, unconfessed except to God, and must not be relieved, until God sends some sickness upon the sinner. It would be a hideous cruel theory. In the case of an inured or habitual or besetting sin, it would be too likely that there might be relapses, for some time, before the habit was, by God’s grace, finally conquered. Those who have had most

Dr. Puller (author of “Moderation of the Church of England”); Bp. Patrick; Dr. Horneck (author of a popular book, *The happy Ascetic*); Bp. Beveridge; Archbishop Sharp; Dr. G. Hickee, Dr. Fiddes (who was still in repute early in this century) Dr. Collier, Dr. Hole, Dr. Bisse, W. Wogan Esq., P. Waldo Esq. (Lect. on the liturgy), R. Cecil; Henry Hallam; Bp. H. Marsh; Prof. Blunt, Bp. Short, Bp. Hamilton, Rev. Sir W. Palmer, Bp. Wordsworth. The whole collection is now published in a cheap form.

experience helping others to conquer in their hard battles, recommend, in the first instance at least, very frequent confession. It is a new knowledge to those who have been habitually defeated, that, by the grace of God, they *can* conquer their besetting sins. When they *do* conquer, they are, it known, very commonly in danger of becoming secure. devil may “depart from” those who have been his slave “for a season,” to renew his attack, if they should become self-confident. Our Lord tells us, that he is watching opportunity to return. “When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places seeking rest and findeth none. Then, he saith, I will return unto my house whence I came out;” and if he “findeth it empty swept and garnished, then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and the enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that is worse than the first.”

But also in the very opposite class, of those who have nothing on their minds but sins of human infirmity. Every (though, as men say, slight) sin is an act of ingratitude against the infinite love of our all-loving God. No two souls are exactly alike; no two diseases; nor the same disease in two different souls; nor are the graces,) vouchsafed to any two souls, the same. Nor can one estimate, what may be, in himself or another, the ingratitude of resisting any check within, i. e. the voice of God the Holy Ghost, warning against any slight sin. Deliberate or wilful commission of any slighter (as they are called) venial sins, forms a class of sin by itself. No one, then, can prescribe for others, in vague terms, what oil these lesser sins ought *not* to disquiet the conscience, and so, according to their interpretation, *not* to be confessed. It would be moral tyranny. Even advancing Christians have found frequent confession, a help against some deep infirmity of our poor nature. Gardeners have recommended frequent mowing, as *the* mode of doing to death the deep-rooted bindweed which, left to itself, spreads and destroys every flower of the garden. Even so, when tending to *exterminate* from the garden of God, that is, our souls, some deep-seated evil, there have been, and are, those who have found frequent confession a real help.

In a matter so very tender and delicate as the relation of the soul to God, I should think that any hard dry technical rules would be an undue interference with God’s inward leading of the soul, and that it would be far safer to leave the frequency to the soul itself. Only, broadly and in contrast with the sayings of those who mostly speak on *à priori* grounds, so far from repeated or habitual confession being “enfeebling” or “injurious to the delicacy of conscience, a temptation to self-deception, formal and perfunctory”²²⁹—or the like, every one, I should think, who knows anything of souls or of confession must know this to be the exact contrary of the truth; they must have seen that the conscience grows more delicate, more truthful, more alive to the truth; more real, more simple, more earnest, more exact. They must have seen how souls which have used it, have “shone more and more to the perfect day.” Other souls have, seemingly grown equally, often more, with less frequent confession. “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof but thou canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth. Even so is every one who is born of the Spirit.” Prayer to God is a simple duty. Our Lord teaches us to pray and not to faint; S. Paul, to pray without ceasing. What is to pray without ceasing? How it best be fulfilled, must vary with different minds or different conditions or circumstances. No one rule could be down. Holy Communion used to be the “daily bread” of the early Christians. There has been much written about its frequency. Devout

²²⁹ Dr. Perowne p. 18.

writers have taken both side The Centurion was devout, who said, “Lord I am no worthy that Thou shouldest come under my roof;” and Zaccheus, “who received Him joyfully.” The streams of Divine grace are not pent up like the water in a canal, one dull, even, unvarying level. We cannot make one unvarying law for souls which God has made so varied, and forms so variously.

It is otherwise with a matter, akin but quite distinct from this, “what is called direction.”

The subject of “direction” (as it is popularly called) is entirely distinct from that of “confession,” so much so, that if this subject of “direction” is mentioned in this volume, it can be only incidentally. The office of a confessor ends with the confession. He prescribes, for given time, such penitential observances or acts or prayers, as he thinks may at once promote penitence, and be remedial against some leading sin confessed. But therewith his office concludes. Since first-confessions were (until of late) among us, mostly of a long period of years, it was natural that those who made them, should have wished, if they had the opportunity, to continue to make them to the person, who received the first, as knowing the soul in a way, in which no other could. But this is entirely voluntary. The confessor retains no right over the conscience. Since, by the words “let him come to me or some other,” which the Church of England puts to the mouth of the parish-priest, it leaves the choice of him to whom any should “open his grief,” absolutely free to each, it gives a corresponding power to *any* priest receive the confession. It is of course, a power to be exercised at any one’s responsibility, in dread of the words, “if the blind lead the blind.” Still the power is by virtue of their ordination lodged in the priest, and no external restriction is placed upon the use of it. It is “effectual, because of Christ’s institution and promise,”²³⁰ by whomsoever administered. All is left to people’s consciences. Of course, there is the obvious peril, that a person may change his confessor, in order to conceal the fact, that the sin which he confesses has been a besetting sin, and that what he has now to confess is a *relapse* into that sin. But this which (as appears from this volume) takes place among insincere persons everywhere, can, like all insincerity, be remedied only by the grace of God.

This may tend perhaps to remove from some minds a popular objection to the use of confession, that the priest, thereby, obtains a power over the conscience. Obvious as it is, it is necessary to say, that, by the fact of receiving a confession, no priest acquires any right whatsoever. If any should have received confession of a sin, which would make him who confessed it amenable to the criminal law (as murder), it is as if the grave closed over it. He is forbidden, under penalty of sin, to allude to it, out of confession, even to him who confessed it. It might obviously occasion many evils, if it were otherwise, and so it is absolutely forbidden. Each confession, if made to the same priest, is absolutely free as the first; it is made and received at the sole wish of him who makes it. People, who are in earnest about their souls, are not capricious about them: and they continue, perhaps for tens of years, to make their confessions to the same priest. They, of course, acquire, so to speak, an additional right to make them, beyond the right which every soul, which has needs, has towards one who has been heretofore its physician. But the priest acquires none. This is all so obvious, that the only occasion for saying it is, that, at this time, so many talk against confession, who absolutely know nothing of it, not the *a b c* of

²³⁰ Art. xxvi.

its rules. It has nothing whatever to do with priestly power, which people have learnt to talk of from the bad book of a French writer.

The office of “confessor” and “director” being thus distinct, I have myself never undertaken what is technically called the office of “director.” Naturally, I have given such spiritual advice as I could, and have answered questions, whenever I have been asked them, to the best of the ability, which God may have given me. These, of course, have ranged over the whole compass of human wants, as far as I could be of use to any one, or they thought that I could be of use, theological, controversial, scriptural, moral, spiritual, practical; cases of conscience or intellectual perplexity. In saying this, I only mean to say, in these days of misunderstanding or misrepresentation, one way or another, that, when I say that I never undertook the office of director, I did not, and could not, when it was laid upon me, in the Providence of God, decline that of guiding in what way I could, by His help, souls which came to me, and did not willingly fail those who came to ask my help, in any respect in which I could help them. But from the first moment, in which people entrusted me in any degree with the care their souls, I remember that my object was to see, how God was leading them, not to lead them myself. I never interfered with any bias or choice, which was not sinful. The event went oftentimes contrary to my human wishes or judgement.

But whether or no I may be thought competent to say anything about direction, I have been asked to take this opportunity of warning against “over-direction.” “I wish,” writes to me, “something could be done to check the tendency on the part of some Clergy to claim *implicit* obedience on all sorts of subjects from their penitents. Instead of trying to deepen and develop the sense of personal moral responsibility, they really crush it, and so help to justify one of the ordinary objections to the system.” This has not originally, I should hope, been the fault of the Clergy, even if some have been participators in it. Over against the wild independence and self-dependence of women as well as men, against God, revelation, Holy Scripture, as a whole or in details, perhaps in consequence of it, there is in others a laziness of mind, which makes rather a boast of getting rid of its own responsibility, rolling all details, little or great, from itself upon the person whom it takes and calls its “director.” The director is referred to, on matters which such an one would much better decide for herself. Some guide their director to misguide themselves. Some justify peculiarities of their own by parading supposed sayings of their ‘director,’ which, having passed through the current of their own minds, have become anything rather than what was originally intended.

Plainly there are provinces, religious, moral; practical, spiritual, upon which we, the clergy, who have vowed to be²³¹ “diligent in prayers, and in reading the Holy Scriptures, and in such studies as help to the knowledge of the same, laying aside the study of the world and the flesh” to “apply ourselves wholly to this one thing, and draw all our cares and studies this way; and continually to pray God the Father, by the mediation of our only Saviour Jesus Christ, for the heavenly assistance of the Holy Ghost; that, by daily reading and weighing of the Scriptures, we may wax riper and stronger in our ministry”—can give more competent opinions to the people committed to our charge, than they can form for themselves. Else there would be no occasion for the office of pastor. One wonders sometimes, what those, who speak against sacerdotalism, really conceive the office of the Clergy to be. To read prayers [intercessors under the

²³¹ Ordering of priests.

great Intercessor according even to the old sign, “The Parson prays for all,” they would hardly allow us to be], to preach sermons (which any or all should criticise, or pronounce not to the Gospel), to teach little children (which is of course a high office), or to be a respectable class of Police officers,) to teach the poor obedience to the law or non-interference with the rich, and the performance of certain religion acts which, although really sacerdotal, they do not acknowledge to be so,—these are certainly no large dimensions of the sacerdotal office, but what more they would leave us, I know not. It would be well, if they would ask themselves.

However, self-assertion, or a seeming wish to gain power over the minds of others, only provokes this counter-depreciation, and gives, at least, a plausible plea for the common declamation against “priestly influence.” It was well said once, that “the guide of souls ought to be transparent to lead people to Christ.” Our office is, not supersede, but to develope and deepen the sense of moral responsibility; to teach those who look to for guidance, how to use the judgement which God has them; to furnish them with clear principles to discern right from wrong: to suggest to them how to discern, in the secret whispers of conscience, the voice of God the Holy Ghost, “a word” which, it is said, “thou shalt hear behind thee saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand and when ye turn to the left;” to distinguish this from the human spirit, or Satan transformed into an angel of light; to train them to obey, not us, but Christ, the Master of both.

But whether they, for whom this is written, heed it or no, whether or no they claim *implicit* obedience on all sorts Subjects from their penitents, or only that deference which those who seek advice owe to those better instructed than themselves, of whom they seek it (such as our Catechism teaches that we owe to our teachers, *spiritual pastors* and masters), this exaggeration of the relation of or and directed belongs to relative strength or weakness of mind. It has no connection with confession. It is a well known principle in the Roman Church, that the Director’s is a distinct office; that, if chosen, he may be different from the ordinary confessor; and that there is no occasion to have any. S. Francis de Sales, I suppose, spoke the literal truth, when, upon being asked who was his director, he produced from his pocket “the Spiritual Combat,” and declared that it had been his director for 18 years.

Evils of this over-direction were forcibly pointed some eight years ago by one much experienced in the guidance of souls, who has observed, from a nearer point than myself, both the good and the defects and mistakes of younger men.

“Direction, rightly understood, is only ‘ghostly counsel and advice’ become habitual. The evils, popularly associated with the idea of direction, and ordinarily intend to be condemned under the term, viz. the substitution of the priest’s judgement for the true action of the conscience of the person under his influence, and the consequent loss of all sense or obligation of personal responsibility, are but the abuse of a most sacred trust. The true object of direction is not to preserve a hold on the mind of the penitent, and habituate it to lean on authority, overruling its own powers of action by minute details of rule, but rather to develope true principles, and awaken dormant energies within the soul, so as to enable it to judge and act more healthfully for itself. Direction, in its true sense, means such help as may strengthen and assist the soul in the use of its renewed powers, not destroy them; quicken its sense of responsibility, not paralyse it.”²³²

²³² Doctrine of Confession in the Church of England, 1869, Rev. T. T. Carter.

And more recently; “I myself greatly prefer the term spiritual guide, to that of director. The latter term, at least, seems to imply an authority over the conscience, that might interfere with its free action, while the former can only imply what we understand to be the true aim of a Confessor, that of giving assistance and support, so as to cooperate with the renewed action of the soul. Conducted on such a principle, confession can but conduce to peace, to strength, and progress in the spiritual life.”²³³

Dr. Neale also spoke strongly against this over-direction. I quote him,²³⁴ not as accepting all which he says, but to shew that there have been protests against over-direction. “There is a danger, lest a sufficiently strong line be not drawn between the practice of Confession, and the practice of Direction. The one is as old as the Apostles, the other the invention of the last three centuries: the one is, though not in all cases necessary, in all cases highly expedient; the other, if sometimes expedient, certainly in many instances pernicious: the one, to persons in earnest, scarcely capable of abuse; the other, the more scrupulous the conscience, the more likely to become a snare: the denial of the one, a virtual negation of the power of the keys; the denial of the other, a simple objection to priestly influence. No two things can, as Direction is generally understood, differ more than that system, and the intercourse which must necessarily exist between the priest and penitent. . . . That which is usually meant by Direction; the recommendation of systems of devotion, plans of life, books, the regulation of intercourse with friends and acquaintances; to these things, and such as these, objection is principally, and, for the most part, not unreasonably made. It may not be easy to set down in black and white the difference between that kind of advice which must necessarily occur in Confession, and that sort of Direction which has nothing to do with it. . . . But, for a single definition, perhaps the advice which is necessary, has to do with a decision between bad and good: that which is always unnecessary, often inexpedient, between good and better. Nothing can be more important than to set prominently before English Churchmen this fact; that with Direction of this kind, Confession has no necessary connexion whatever. Incalculable mischief has arisen from the confusion of the two. Good men, for instance, who never dare to breathe a syllable in depreciation of the supernatural powers of Absolution which Christ has committed to us, are continually expressing a hope that Confession may not be too frequent, may be the exception and not the rule. Why? Because, say they, individual consciences ought to be individually responsible; because repetition of such intercourse tends to keep the soul in a kind of spiritual leading-strings; because there is a danger in shifting the burden of one’s own conscience on to the shoulders of another; that is, they object to Confession because they discover, and that with no inconsiderable degree of truth, danger in Direction. . . . And, as there is danger of Direction being engrafted on Confession, so also I cannot deny that, in some cases among ourselves, this system has prevailed, and its fruits have been apparent.”

The following words relate to an experience which was his, (for he states that it was)—not mine. Those of tender consciences may feel very slight sins of human infirmity, more than others do whole cart-loads of deadly sin. The desire for confession

²³³ Freedom of confession in the Church of England, a Letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury. 1877 pp. 11, 12.

²³⁴ Difficulties p. 238 quoted by Canon Cooke, Power of the Priesthood in absolution p. 106.

implies the tenderness of conscience, not the gravity of the sin. And so souls may come frequently to confession, in order to hear our Lord's absolving voice, without burdening themselves or the Priest with undue direction. Plainly any who should use confession for advice rather than for absolution, should be sent back to learn what all sin is, an offence against the infinite love of the All-good God, ingratitude to Him Who became Man and died for love of us.

Dr. Neale's experience, against which he protests in such strength of words, was, "We know how many, especially among women, in coming to Confession for the time, come rather for Direction, than for Absolution: look for the guide, rather than for the ambassador; desire the counsellor rather than the priest. Details of domestic life, engagements in the world, plans of amusement, plans of study, the division of the day, the intercourse with friends: all these things are ready, if we do not resist the tendency, to be submitted to us; things which have a right or a wrong; things, which may be pursued in a thousand ways, the one as Christian as the other; things in many cases, respecting which the interrogator is likely to form a far more correct judgement than the priest: what have we to do with all this? Who hath required this at our hands? Yet this it is that sets English minds against auricular Confession: this that cuts so many off from one of the great means of grace."

It is right to add that among the writers who are popularly decried as wishing to gain power over people's souls, one writes,²³⁵

"The Director should aim at strengthening the sense of personal responsibility in those who consult him, and at increasing the sensitiveness and vigour of their consciences.

"Over-direction commonly weakens the conscience by leading persons to lean rather upon external aid than upon those natural instincts of right and wrong which have been implanted in them by God. A wise Physician will discourage the habitual use of drugs, and will rather urge attention to regimen and exercise.

"The Director should therefore reserve his aid for matters of real difficulty. If applied to in simple and obvious cases, he should rather, by appealing to the conscience the inquirer, endeavour to draw the answer from his lips.

"To avoid the grave perils of over-direction, the Director will take care that the interviews which he grants shall be short and infrequent."

I will add one more extract, from one deservedly loved (although the writer no longer belonged to our Church when he wrote it,) because he was giving not his own opinion, but,²³⁶ "reporting fairly both sides of the Catholic tradition, as it is to be found both in ancient books and modern, inclining perhaps a little to the ancient, because on this point of asceticism as on most others," he says, "I find in them an absence of exaggeration, which I often desiderate in modern systems. My object will to prevent any opinion of my own escaping me." The description of this office is—

"The business of a director is not that of a pioneer. I is rather to go behind, and to watch God going before. He must keep his eye fixed on God, Who is in the dimness ahead. He does not lead his penitents. The Holy Ghost leads them. He holds out his hands from behind, as mother does to her tottering child, to balance his uncertain steps, as he sways overmuch, now on one side, now on another. He is not to have a way of his own

²³⁵ The Priest's Prayer-book, p. 160. 3rd. ed.

²³⁶ Faber, Growth in holiness. The office of spiritual Director pp. 330, 331

applied to every one. . . . He only knows that we are in the which is right for us, when he sees God in front. Then he keeps us superstitiously in the Blessed Foot-prints left behind. He looks after our advance, and when he sees increasing the distance between Himself and the he spurs on the latter, discreetly and gently, yet and uninterruptedly. He gains as much light from prayer as from his knowledge of character and his personal observation of ourselves. His office is very supernatural, but it is very natural also; and he will not direct us well, if he overshadows the natural by the supernatural. It would be a safer mistake, if he attributed a light to his natural penetration and sagacity, the divination of his own genius, which was really due to a gratuitous and supernatural discernment of spirits, than if he took that for supernatural which was really natural. It is a perilous thing to make a superstition of direction.....Above all, let us have no mysteries in direction.”²³⁷

The subject is of moment, not only on account of grave mischief to souls, which may result, if over-direction (as is not unlikely) should become misdirection, but of the slur upon confession itself, which such mistakes occasion, although relating to matters of human prudence or skill, not to the Divine gift itself. The mistake has, I imagine, originated, not with the Clergy, but with young people of indolent, or contrariwise enthusiastic temperament. Still we, the Clergy, are not exempt from the human infirmity of love of power, which in us, as well as in the rest of our race, can only be kept down by the grace of God; only in us it would be the more mischievous, because of the possible harm to souls. Being men, we are liable to all infirmities of men, and the more some wish to be over-directed, the more danger there is lest we should over-direct. It is of course flattering to human self-esteem to be consulted on all sorts of matters; so we have need watch warily, even when walking in a right path.

Amid all our sorrows, this subject of revived confession has a two-fold comfort in these troubled times.

1) It illustrates the power of teaching in our English Prayer-book, in the language of the people. In every Baptism, the Prayer-Book teaches Baptismal regeneration: in its Catechism and every Communion, it teaches the Presence: in its Ordinations the Bishop transmits the authority to remit sins in the Name of Christ: in the Communion-office, it teaches communicants to resort confession, if they need it: in its service for the sick, it regulates the use of confession. The Prayer-book all the Clergy, must acknowledge, as above and superior ourselves. It is an authority, which, if we contradict, condemn ourselves. It alone taught our Laity, in the first instance, to use confession: the laity, in those early days, often unknowingly taught it to their Clergy by asking to use it. For a distinct proportion of the Clergy who in those days sought confession, did so, on the ground that it was inconsistent, they thought, to hear the confessions which they were asked to hear, and not to make one themselves.

2) It has been a characteristic of this revival that it has been sacramental.²³⁸ It was

²³⁷ *Ib.* pp. 341. 340.

²³⁸ It used to be put forward, in the earlier defences of ourselves, nearly forty years ago and onwards, that the formularies of the Church of England never severed off the two great Sacraments of the Gospel, without signifying that there were other gifts, which were, in some sense, Sacraments, having outward signs of inward grace; “*signa visibilia invisibilis gratiæ.*” In this sense confirmation, ordination, absolution are Sacraments. Marriage is so termed by S. Paul. See Dr. Pusey’s “letter to the Bishop of Oxford,” 1839, pp. 97—109. “Letter, on the Articles treated on in Tract xc” “Number of Sacraments” Ed. 2. 1841 pp. 33—42. “Letter to the Bp. of London” pp. 5—16, in which I quoted (p. 10) “a work which received, after the

the early reproach of controversialists, “They [the Tractarians] substitute the sacraments for Christ.” As if Christ’s sacraments could be substituted for Christ: since it is He, into Whom Baptism engrafts us, and the Holy Eucharist is His Presence; in It, “we eat the Flesh of Christ and drink His Blood; we dwell in Christ, and Christ in us; we are one with Christ, and Christ with us.” But the reproach acknowledged that the revival was Sacramental. And this was its characteristic. A revival, if there should be one in a Presbyterian body, would turn in some way on the relation of the soul to God and Christ, perhaps to the eternal decrees of His love, and the immediate relation of the soul to Him. It is the very principle of such bodies, that nothing should intervene between the soul and its God. They have not sacraments in the Church’s sense. They reject what they call rightly “Sacerdotal absolution.” If God were to make such a revival a channel of grace, it would be through the amount of truth, contained in it. It is a naked Gospel, which Wesleyanism preaches, that “we are all Sinners; Christ died for sinners; He bids sinners come to Him Who redeemed us by His Blood; if we come to Him, He will receive us.” It is partial truth; but, as far as it goes, it *is* truth. And God blesses through truth. In like way, a Presbyterian believes and teaches “spiritual Communion.” Spiritual Communion is a blessed truth. It might be made, with every breath we breathe. In this too, God blesses through truth. In the Church of England, the revival has been through gifts which belong only to the Church, the Sacrament of His Body and Blood, and the power of the keys, which He committed to His Church and which belong to her alone. And He Who blesses through truth, has blessed through them, and has set His seal upon them.

This particular help to the right discharge of the office of hearing confessions contains the advice of some of the most experienced Confessors in the later Church, distributed in the order of subjects adopted by the Gaume.

The Abbé Gaume, in his preface to the collection, says that his “guiding thought in translating and framing that work” was; “If all the faithful were still, at this day, confessed and directed by S. Charles Borromeo, S. Francis Xavier, S. Philip de Neri, &c. they would lose nothing in being so confessed and directed. On the other hand, if confessors, especially at the outset, could say to themselves, ‘I hear confessions, as S. Charles, S. Francis de Sales, S. Francis Xavier, S. Philip de Neri, &c.; I follow the same rules, which sanctified them and many other with them,’ they would not make their sacred ministry a subject of scruple and torment.”

In doing this, the Abbé Gaume laid it down as a duty to himself, to insert the whole which each of these teachers had said, “without adding, diminishing, change or commentary.” This, of course, had the advantage, that the same advice was often reiterated, almost in the same words, and so bore the stamp of all those minds, shewing the harmony and agreement between them. There did not seem the same reason for this in

first edition, the sanction of the Most Reverend the Abps. of Canterbury and of Armagh to whom it was by Permission, inscribed.” It was also, I understood, recommended to Candidates for Holy Orders. In it, I said, Mr. Palmer cites for the more extended use of the word Sacrament, not Fathers only but, in our own Church, Archbishops Cranmer and Secker, Bishop Jeremy Taylor and Mason. Of late, this sense has been assumed as known. Bp. Overall also uses it. ab. p. lviii.

this Compendium. Some things have been omitted as being virtually repetitions; some, as not belonging to the state of things in which we are, (in which we have no occasion for discussions on rigorism or relaxedness, of probabilism or probabiorism, or on “reserved cases.”) As in other books of this series, I have felt it to be my duty to adhere to the teaching of the later English Church. The translator has used a vivid and condensed style, without, I trust, sacrificing any of the thoughts of the original. May God, in His mercy, enable the work to speak to the consciences of those for whom Jesus died, and fit us, the Clergy, more to minister to them!

E.B. PUSEY.

CHRIST CHURCH.
ADVENT 1877.

[It may not be amiss to subjoin a Declaration, to which 29 well-known names were appended, which we put forth some 4 years ago, in view of “the serious misapprehensions prevalent on the subject of confession and absolution;” as being “what we hold and teach on the subject, in reference to the points which have been brought under discussion.”

1. We believe and profess, that Almighty God has promised forgiveness of sins, through the Precious Blood of Jesus Christ, to all who turn to Him, with true sorrow for sin, out of unfeigned and sincere love to Him, with full purpose of amendment of life, and lively faith in Jesus Christ.

2. We also believe and profess, that our Lord Jesus Christ has instituted in His Church a special means for the remission of sin after Baptism, and for the relief of consciences, which special means the Church of England retains and administers as part of her Catholic heritage.

3. We affirm that—to use the language of the Homilies—“Absolution hath the promise of forgiveness of sin,”²³⁹ although “by the express word of the New Testament it hath not this promise annexed and tied to the visible sign, which is imposition of hands,” and “therefore,” as it is said, “Absolution is no such Sacrament as Baptism and the Communion are.”²⁴⁰ We cannot admit, that the Church of England in Art. xxv. condemns the ministry of Absolution any more than she condemns the Rites of Confirmation and Ordination, which she solemnly administers. We believe that God through Absolution confers an inward spiritual grace and His assurance of forgiveness on those who receive it with faith and repentance, as in Confirmation and Ordination He confers grace on those who rightly receive the same.

4. In our Ordination, as Priests of the Church of England, the words of our Lord to His Apostles—“Receive ye the Holy Ghost; whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them, and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained,”—were applied to us individually. Thus it appears, that the Church of England considers this Commission to be, not a temporary endowment of the Apostles, but a gift lasting to the end of time. It was said to each of us, “Receive ye the Holy Ghost for the office and work of a Priest in the Church of GOD, now committed unto thee by the imposition off our hands;” and then followed the words, “Whose sins thou dost forgive, they are forgiven, and whose sins thou dost retain, they are retained.”²⁴¹

5. The only form of words provided for us in the Book of Common Prayer for applying this absolving power to individual souls, runs thus:—“Our Lord Jesus Christ, Who hath left power to His Church to absolve all sinners who truly repent and believe in Him) of His great mercy forgive thee thine offences; And by His Authority committed to me I absolve thee from all thy sins, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amend.” Upon this we remark, first, that in these words forgiveness of sins is ascribed to Him Who, as God, forgives sins, our Lord Jesus Christ; yet that the Priest, acting by a delegated authority and as an instrument, does through these words convey the absolving grace; and secondly, that the absolution from sins cannot be understood to

²³⁹ Homily “of Common Prayer and Sacraments.”

²⁴⁰ *Ib.*

²⁴¹ “The Form and Manner of Ordering of Priests.”

be the removal of any censures of the Church, because (a) the sins from which the penitent is absolved are presupposed to be sins known previously to himself and God only: (b) the words of the Latin form to those censures are omitted in our English form, and (c) the release from excommunication is in Art. xxxiii reserved to “a Judge that hath authority thereunto.”

6. This provision, moreover, shews that the Church of England speaking of “the benefit of absolution,” and empowering her Priests to absolve, means them to use a definite form of absolution, and did not merely contemplate a general reference to the promises the Gospel.

7. In the Service for “the Visitation of the sick” the Church of orders that the sick man shall even *‘be moved* to make a Confession of his sins, if he feel his conscience troubled with any weighty matter.” When the Church requires that the sick man should, in such case, he moved to make a special Confession of his sins, we cannot suppose her thereby to rule that her members are bound to defer to a death-bed (which they may never see) what they know to be good for their souls. We observe that the words, “be moved to,” were added in 1662, and that therefore at the last revision of the Book of Common Prayer the Church of England affirmed the duty of exhorting to Confession in certain cases even more strongly than at the date of the Reformation.

8. The Church of England also, holding it “requisite that no man should come to the Holy Communion, but with a sure trust in God’s mercy, and with a quiet conscience,” commands the Minister to bid “any” one who “cannot quiet his own conscience herein,” to come to him, or “to some other discreet Minister of God’s Word and open his grief, that by the ministry of God’s Holy Word he may receive the benefit of absolution, together with,” and therefore distinct from, “ghostly counsel and advice,”²⁴² and since she directs that this invitation should be repeated in giving warning of Holy Communion, and Holy Communion is constantly offered to all, as the most precious of the means of grace, it follows that the use of Confession may be, at least in some cases, of not unfrequent occurrence.

9. We believe that the Church left it to the consciences of individuals, according to their sense of their needs, to decide whether they would confess or not, as expressed in that charitable exhortation in the First English Prayer-book, “requiring such as shall be satisfied with a general Confession, not to be offended with them that do use, to their further satisfying, the auricular and secret Confession to the Priest; nor those also, which think needful or convenient, for the quietness of their own consciences, particularly open their sins to the Priest, to be offended with them that are satisfied with their humble confession to God and the general Confession to the Church: but in all things to follow and keep the rule of charity; and every man to be satisfied with his own conscience, not judging other men’s minds or consciences; whereas he hath no warrant in God’s Word to the same.” And although this passage was omitted in the second Prayer-book, yet that its principle was not repudiated may be gathered from the “Act for the Uniformity of Service” (1552) which, while authorizing the second Prayer-book, asserts the former book to be “agreeable to the Word of God and the primitive Church.”

10. We would further observe, that the Church of England has nowhere limited the occasions upon which her Priests should exercise the office which she commits to them at their ordination; that to command her Priests in two of her Offices to hear

²⁴² Exhortation in the Service for the Holy Communion.

confessions, if made, cannot be construed negatively into a command not to receive confessions on any other occasions. But, in fact, since the Christian ought to live in continual preparation for Holy Communion and for death, the two occasions specified do practically comprise the whole of his adult life. It is notorious that a long succession of Divines (great repute in the Church of England, from the very time when the English Prayer-book was framed, speak highly of Confession, with out limiting the occasions upon which, or the frequency with which it should be used; and the 113th Canon, framed in the Convocation of 1603, recognized Confession as a then existing practice, in that it decreed under the severest penalties, that “if any man confess his secret and hidden sins to the Minister for the unburdening of his conscience, the said Minister shall not at any time reveal or make known to any person whatsoever, any crime or offence so committed to his trust and secrecy, except they be such crimes as by the laws of this realm his own life maybe called into question for concealing the same.

11. While then we hold that no Priest is justified in requiring private Confession as a condition of receiving Holy Communion, also hold that all who, under the circumstances above stated, claim the privilege of private Confession, are entitled to it, and that the Clergy are directed under certain circumstances to “move” persons to such confession. In insisting on this, as the plain meaning the authorized language of the Church of England, we believe ourselves to be discharging our duty as her faithful Ministers.”]