



The Castel
of comfort, in the whyche it
is evidently proued, that God
alone absolueth, & frely forge-
ueth ye sins of so many as bu
faynedly repent & turne
vnto hym, compyled
by *Thomas Becon.*

Esaye. xliiii.

I am he onely, that for myne owne
selles sake do awai thine offences, and
forget thy synnes: so that I wyl neuer
thyncke vpon them.

Johan. vii

If any man be thirsty, let him come
vnto me and drynke.

Psal. xxxiiii.

Oh taste & se, howe swete the lordes
is, blessed is that man that putteth
hys trust in hym.

ARISE FOR

IT IS DAY.

MOST HONOURABLE AND VIRTUOUS LADY MARIE¹,

DUCHESS OF RICHMOND HER GRACE, THOMAS BECON WISHETH FROM
 GOD THE FATHER, THROUGH OUR LORD JESU CHRIST,
 A FAITHFUL PERSEVERANCE IN GOD'S MOST
 HOLY WORD UNTO THE END.

2 Thess. ii. It is not without a great cause, most godly lady, that the holy apostle St Paul desired the Thessalonians to hold fast the doctrine that he had taught them afore; and not suddenly to be moved from their knowledge and understanding, nor to be troubled, neither by spirit, neither by words, nor yet by letter. For he undoubtedly did afore see, by the revelation of God's Spirit, that there should arise false anointed and false preachers, which should work great miracles and wonders, insomuch that, if it were possible, the very elect and chosen people of God should be brought into error; which also should say, Behold here is Christ, or, There is Christ; "bringing in damnable sects, and utterly denying the Lord that bought them," as Peter saith. He considered the imbecility, weakness, and childish hearts of men, which, except they be corroborated and fortified with the strength of God's Spirit, are soon "carried about with divers and strange learnings," embracing no less greedily that, that is to themselves noisome and pestiferous, than that which is good and profitable; as we at this present time see daily before our eyes, both in the papists and anabaptists, with such other damnable sectaries.

Matt. xxiv.

2 Pet. ii.

Heb. xiii.

Therefore this most excellent apostle desired the Thessalonians, yea, and so many of us as profess Christ unfeignedly, to persevere and abide in the word of truth even

[¹ The Lady Mary, duchess of Richmond, was daughter of Thomas Howard, third duke of Norfolk, by Elizabeth, the daughter of Edward, duke of Buckingham; and was one of the most beautiful women of her time. She was affianced in very early life to Henry Fitzroy, natural son to king Henry VIII. by Elizabeth, daughter of Sir John Blount, knight, and widow of Gilbert, lord Talboys. As the parties were within the forbidden decrees of consanguinity, a dispensation was obtained for the marriage; which however, owing to the tender age of both, was not formally celebrated. Fitzroy had various honours heaped upon him. He was elected a knight of the garter, then created earl of Nottingham, and duke of Richmond and Somerset: he was made lieutenant-general of all the king's forces north of the Trent, warden of the marches of Scotland, and afterwards lieutenant of Ireland, sir William Skeffington being appointed his deputy. He was a youth of great promise, and died aged about 17, in 1536; his marriage with lady Mary Howard thus being never consummated. He was buried at Thetford; and, at the dissolution of the abbey there, his remains were transferred to St Michael's church at Framlingham. After the death of Richmond, the duke of Norfolk proposed marrying his daughter to Sir Thos. Seymour, brother to the earl of Hertford (afterwards the protector duke of Somerset); but, whatever the obstacles might be, no such union took place. On the indictment of the earl of Surrey for high treason,

the duchess of Richmond incurred much opprobrium for appearing among her brother's accusers. She alleged that he had dissuaded her from going too far in reading the scriptures, and that he had set up an altar in a church at Boulogne. If it be allowed to put a charitable construction on her conduct, we may suppose that she was possessed, as Becon says, "of exceeding love and fervent zeal toward the word of God," and thought that her principles required of her this evidence. Possibly too she gave it with reluctance. Certain it is that she discharged in a most exemplary manner a mother's duty to the children of Surrey, two sons and three daughters, who were placed under her care after his unjust execution. She appointed Foxe, the martyrologist, their tutor, who spared no pains in the education of his pupils. So sensible were her own family of her excellent conduct, that the duke of Norfolk, her father, made a testamentary bequest to her on that account: "Unto my daughter the lady Mary, duchess of Richmond, the sum of £500., as well in consideration that she is my daughter, as that she hath been at great costs and charges in making suit for my delivery out of imprisonment, and in bringing up my said son of Surrey's children." She had besides a grant of £100. a year from the crown on the same account. Other grants of manors and lands were also made to her, both by Henry VIII. and Edward VI. The duchess died about the year 1555.]

unto the end, that we may be saved, and not lightly to be moved with the subtle Matt. x.
and crafty persuasions of them that teach "weak and beggarly traditions" with human Gal. iv.
constitutions; which give heed to fables and men's commandments, "that turn away Tit. i.
the followers of them from the truth;" "which profess that they know God, but with
their deeds they deny him, inasmuch as they are abominable and disobedient, yea,
and unmeet to all good works;" "which love their own pleasures more than God, 2 Tim. iii.
having an utter appearance of godly living, but denying the power thereof;" "which
run from house to house, and bring into bondage both men and women loaden with
sin;" "which are led with divers lusts, ever learning, and never able to come unto
the knowledge of the truth;" which are "enemies of the cross of Christ;" which "call Phil. iii.
that is evil good, and that is good evil," &c.; in few, which are "ravening wolves, Isal. v.
not sparing the flock," Acts xx.

Doth the world want these enemies of God's glory? Have not we also need to
take heed unto the aforesaid wholesome admonition of the holy apostle St Paul? Doth
not the world at this day nourish such ungodly monsters? What age hath been without
them since the beginning of the world?

What need I to speak of that great whore of Babylon, "the mother of fornications Rev. xvii.
and abominations of the earth," which hath made drunken with the wine of the
wrath of her whoredom all the nations of the earth; yea, the very kings and rulers
of the earth have played the advouterers with her? The fornication of that most filthy
and stinking strumpet is so openly known, and made manifest unto us, both by godly
books and learned sermons, that it needeth not here to be rehearsed. And would God
that, as the name of this Babylonical strumpet is exiled out of men's mouths, and rased
out of books among us; so in like manner her whoredom (I mean, the popish and
devilish decrees, which fight with the manifest word of God) might once be utterly
exiled, banished, and for ever driven away from the bounds of christendom; that all
things in the christian public weal, both in this and in other foreign realms, might
be instituted, ordered, and appointed, according to the verity of Christ's most blessed
gospel!

But besides this monstrous beast, are there risen not a few which are plain
antichrists, and daily labour to obscure the glory of God. No marvel, seeing that in
the apostles' time, blessed John confesseth that there were many antichrists and false 1 John ii. iv.
prophets. What need I to speak of them, which teach that Christ by his most precious 1 John i.
death delivered us only from original sin? Which teach that man is justified by his
own works, and not by the faith alone that he hath in Christ's most blessed death? Rom. iii. ix.
Which teach that by observing men's traditions everlasting life is gotten? Which Eph. ii.
teach that external ceremonies justify and put away sin? Which teach that man is
able of his own strength to fulfil the law, and to satisfy the justice of God? Which John vii. xv.
teach that our prayers cannot be heard without the intercession of other? Which 1 Tim. ii.
teach that all honour pertaineth not to God alone? Which teach that the blood of 1 John i.
our Saviour Jesu Christ is not a sufficient purgatory for all our sins, except we be
broiled, boiled, and parboiled in the pope's furnace? Which teach that the Lord Christ Heb. vii. ix.
gave not himself so plenteously a sweet-smelling sacrifice to God the Father for us, Eph. v.
that, with the one oblation of his most blessed body, he hath made them perfect for
evermore, that are sanctified? Which teach that God alone forgiveth not sin, but Matt. ix.
sinful man also? Are not these very antichrists? enemies of the cross of Christ? Mark ii.
defacers of God's glory, false anointed? false preachers, ravening wolves? "clouds with-
out water? trees without fruit? raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame? 2 Pet. ii.
wandering stars, to whom is reserved that mist of darkness for ever?" "men-pleasers, [Jude.].
having men in great reverence for avantage sake? cursed children, which have forsaken
the right way, and are gone astray?"

These are they doubtless, of whom both Christ and his apostles bid us take heed
in so many places of the holy scriptures. Against these ought all men to fight, that
tender the glory of God. To confound these antichrists, ought we to sell wallet, scrip, Luke xvii.
coat, with all that ever we have, and to buy us a sword: I mean that "sword of the Eph. vi.
Spirit, which is the word of God."

And to this end, that I may provoke other valiantly and boldly to fight against

these aforesaid antichrists, I, according to the talent given me, have taken upon me to wrestle with those wicked papists which believe and teach that God alone doth not forgive sin, but man also with the same power, and like authority. Which thing I take in hand the more gladly, because I see that this kind of doctrine is a great defacing of God's glory, and that it throweth many into great danger; forasmuch as they look for that at the hand of man, which only is the gift of God; yea, it encourageth not a few to live dissolutely and without the fear of God, seeing they are persuaded, that if the priest layeth his hand once upon their head, and say, *Ego absolvo te*, they are quite delivered of their sinful burden; and, though they return straightways unto their filthy vomit, what skilleth it? *Ego absolvo te* will dispatch all together. If any man "sitteth in the temple of God, boasting himself as God," surely they do it, which take upon them the office of God, that is, to remit and forgive sin. But they shall be slain with the breath of the Lord's mouth.

2 Thess. ii.

Isai. xi.

The order of
the doctrine
contained in
this treatise
following.

The order which I will observe in the treatise following is this. First, I will prove with manifest scriptures, that God alone forgiveth sin. Secondly, that the priest is but a minister appointed of God, to declare free remission of sins to the truly penitent, to declare, I say, and not to forgive. Thirdly, I will answer to the objections of the adversaries, and utterly wipe them away, restoring the scriptures to their native sense. At the last, lest I should seem to despise the true and christian absolution of a faithful minister, and the use of the keys, which consisteth in preaching, I will express my mind concerning them also, so that to any indifferent person I doubt not but that my judgment shall appear godly and conformable¹ to the true vein of the holy scriptures.

This little treatise, most virtuous lady, I send unto your grace, as a testimony of my ready bent good-will and serviceable heart toward your grace, being provoked hereunto through your exceeding love and fervent zeal, which your most honourable ladyship bear, both toward the word of God, and the true professors of the same; most humbly beseeching your grace to take in good part this my rude and simple gift. God, which by his holy Spirit hath wrought in your heart this entire love toward the gospel of his Son Christ Jesu, mought also bring forth in your grace plenteousness of good works, unto the glory of his blessed name, and the profit of his holy congregation!

Amen.

(*)

Your grace's most humble and faithful
orator, THOMAS BECON.

[¹ Folio, *confyrnable*.]

THE CASTLE OF COMFORT.

THAT God alone absolveth the truly penitent, and only forgiveth the sins of so many as with unfeigned faith and hearty repentance convert, turn, and flee unto his mercy, it is manifestly proved by divers texts of the holy scripture. The first part.

First, let us hear what God himself saith by the prophet: "I am he, yea, I am he in deed, which putteth away thy sins; yea, and that for mine own sake; and I will remember thy sins no more. Call to remembrance, and let us be judged together. Tell, if thou hast any thing that thou mayest be justified. Thy first father sinned; and thy prophets have trespassed against me." Are not these words evident enough? God the Father, perceiving right well that there should arise false anointed and false preachers, which without all shame would arrogantly arrogate, and proudly challenge to themselves that power of forgiving sin which alone pertaineth to him, plainly here affirmeth that he alone putteth away our sins. And because he would have us the more seriously and earnestly to believe it, he repeateth this word "I" twice, saying: "I am he, yea, I am he in deed, which putteth away thy sins; yea, and that for mine own sake." And lest any man should think that one may more forgive another his sins (I speak of those sins which are between God and our conscience, and not of the brotherly reconciliation), he affirmeth that our first father Adam, and all prophets and preachers have sinned, so that of them no remission of sins is to be looked for. Isai. xlii.
Matt. xxiv.
Rom. iii.
Rom. xi.

Can flesh purify the soul? "That which is born of flesh is flesh," saith Christ. "All have sinned," saith St Paul, "and want the glory of God." Again: "God hath wrapped all nations," saith he, "in unbelief, that he might have mercy on all." If all be sinners, flesh, and the children of wrath; if all be hypocrites, unprofitable servants, earth, dust and ashes; if all be the enemies of God, and unfaithful, how dare we be so bold, as to take upon us one to forgive another their sins? Is a traitor a meet man to purchase a pardon of a prince for another traitor? Can one traitor forgive another his treason? Can one sinner forgive another his sin? Of the unclean what can be made clean?—as Job saith: "Who can make him clean, that is conceived of unclean seed?" Is it not thou alone, O Lord? It is the Lord alone in deed, as David saith: Thou, O Lord, shalt "sprinkle me with hyssop, and I shall be made clean; yea, I shall be made whiter than snow." And as our Saviour Christ said unto Peter: "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me." If God washeth us not from our filthiness, we have no part in the heritage of Christ. John iii.
Rom. iii.
Rom. xi.
Eph. ii.
Lüke xvii.
Job xiv.
Psal. li.
John xiii.

Again, the aforesaid prophet saith: "The Lord is our judge, the Lord is our lawgiver, the Lord is our king; and he it is that shall save us." How oft is "the Lord" here repeated, to shew that it is he alone which worketh all good things in us, which forgiveth our sins, and saveth us; yea, and none but he alone. Isai. xxxiii.

Again, the Lord himself saith by the same prophet: "I am the Lord; and there is no Saviour besides me." Here God himself confesseth that he alone is the Lord, and that there is none other Saviour besides him; that is to say, none that forgiveth sin, and giveth eternal life, but he alone. By another prophet he also saith: "Thy destruction, O Israel, cometh of thyself: only of me cometh thy help and salvation." David, that holy king and godly prophet, knowing his deliverance from sin to be of God alone, stirreth up his inward man to magnify the Lord, saying: "Magnify the Lord, O my soul; and all that are within me, praise his holy name. O my soul, bless the Lord, and forget not all his benefits. For he it is that pardoneth all thine iniquities, and that healeth all thy diseases: yea, he it is that delivereth thy life from destruction, and crowneth thee in mercy and loving-kindness." Again: "Let Israel trust in the Lord; for with the Lord there is infinite mercy, and plenteous Isai. xliii.
Hos. xiii.
Psal. ciii.
Psal. cxxx.

redemption. And he it is that redeemeth Israel from all their sins." Whosoever therefore taketh on him to forgive sin, maketh himself a saviour, and saith with the angel *apostata*: "I will climb up above the high clouds, and I will be like unto the Most Highest." But let him know that pride will have a fall, and that "the Lord is a jealous God, and will give his glory to none other."

Who delivered Adam from everlasting damnation, when he with his wife had transgressed the commandment of the high Lord? Who absolved Nohe from his drunkenness? Who delivered Loth from the uncleanness which he committed with his daughters? Who saved Moyses, and forgave him his manslaughter? Who absolved David from his adultery? Who had compassion on the Ninivites when they repented, believed, and converted? To be short, who forgave and absolved all the patriarchs, kings, prophets, priests, &c., with all other of the old testament, when they knowledged their sins, and returned unto the Lord their God with faithful repentance, but only God alone? To whom did they flee for remission of sins, but to God alone? In whom did they put their affiance and trust, but in God alone, as the psalmograph testifieth, saying: "Our fathers trusted in thee, O Lord: yea, they trusted in thee; and thou deliverest them. They cried unto thee, and they were made safe: in thee, O Lord, they trusted, and were not confounded." Are not these the words of blessed David? "I said, I will confess my sins unto the Lord; and thou forgavest the wickedness of my sin." Here is no mention made of Aaron, or of any of that priesthood; nor yet of pope, patriarch, cardinal, archbishop, bishop, priest, or of any other man to forgive us our sins, but of God alone. So followeth it, that the Lord alone remitteth the ungodliness of our sin, and that he alone absolve *a poena et culpa*.

This was godly doctrine in the old testament; neither was he counted of godly men any heretic that taught this kind of learning at that time. God was then the Lord alone omnisufficient for all his people that truly repented and converted to his unmeasurable mercy; neither had he need at that time of any other to be conjoined with him, as he himself said unto Abraham: "Fear not Abraham: I am thy defender, and thine altogether sufficient rewarder:" and is the Lord's hand now so abbreviated and shortened, that he can save no more? or is his ear so stopped that he can not hear? Lord God, what a sudden change is this! But I stedfastly believe that he is the same Lord now, that he was in the old time, and of no less power to remit sin at this present, than he was many thousand years before these our days; inasmuch as he abideth ever one, and is not changeable, 'as he saith by the prophet Malachi: "I am the Lord, and am not changed."

Hitherto have I been bold in few words to prove that in the time of the old law God alone forgave the sins of his people, without the help either of bishop, prophet, priest, Levite, or any other; that the whole glory of their salvation might be ascribed to him alone. Now let us also labour to declare that God alone doth the very same thing in the new testament; that he alone may still remain the God of health, against the pestilent doctrine of the wicked papists, which so boarishly sweat to maintain their usurped power and feigned authority in forgiving sin, to the great obscuring of God's glory; and that to him alone all honour and praise may be given.

We read in the holy gospel that, when a certain man being diseased of the palsy was brought unto Christ to be made whole, Christ said unto him: "Son, be on a good comfort: thy sins are forgiven thee." The scribes, hearing these words of forgiving sin, thinking with themselves that Christ was not God, but man only, and that it was the office of God alone to remit and forgive sin, spake on this manner within themselves: *Hic blasphemat*: "This fellow blasphemeth;" or, as Mark and Luke writeth: "Who is he that speaketh blasphemies? Who is able to forgive sin but God alone?" Here the scribes, tendering more the glory of God than our papists and Pharisees do at this time, could not abide that Christ, whom they judged only man, should challenge to him power to forgive sin, seeing that alone pertained to God. And upon this place of the scripture many write, that the scribes erred not in this confession that God alone forgiveth sin, but in this they say they were deceived, because they believed not that Christ was both God and man. If Christ had been nothing but man, he had blasphemed in deed; that is to say, taken that thing upon him which is the

Isai. xiv.

Isai. xlii.

Gen. iii.

Gen. xix.

Exod. ii.
2 Sam. xi.
Jonah iv.

Psal. xxii.

Psal. xxxii.

Gen. xv.

Isai. lix.

Mal. iii.

1 Tim. i.

Matt. ix.

Mark ii.
Luk. v.

office of God alone : but forasmuch as he was not only man, but also God, he blasphemeth not, he challenged nothing but that was his right. So did the scribes, and not Christ, blaspheme. Let all men therefore learn of this history, that God alone forgiveth sin.

Doth not Christ also, in the aforesaid chapter of Matthew, call himself a physician, Matt. ix. and shew that he came to call sinners unto repentance, and to make them whole? Why calleth he himself a physician, but because it is his office to cure and heal? Jeremy prayed unto this physician, saying: "Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed: Jer. xvii. save thou me, and I shall be safe; for thou art he whom I will magnify." For he did know full well that all other physicians were unprofitable without his help, and no more meet to cure sick consciences of themselves, than the old lion was to heal the horse, of whom Esop writeth in his fables, which notwithstanding take on him to practise physic, when of that same science he was altogether ignorant.

Moreover, Christ calleth all them that labour and are laden to him, and promiseth Matt. xi. that he will refresh, ease, and comfort them. He sendeth them not away to other, but calleth them all, without exception, to him; whereby he sheweth that no creature, neither in heaven nor in earth, can truly and sufficiently heal our infirm and sick consciences, but he alone, which saith: "I am the resurrection and life. He that John xi. believeth in me, although he be dead, shall live; and every one that liveth and believeth in me shall never die." For who can forgive me my sin, but he alone, which is without 1 Pet. ii. all sin? Who can deliver me from death and hell, but he alone, which hath overcome Hos. xiii. them both? Who can make me good, but he alone, which only is good? Who can Matt. xi. make me wise, righteous, and holy, but he alone, which is appointed of God the Father to be our "wisdom, righteousness, and sanctification?" Finally, who can engraff in 1 Cor. i. me life and virtue, but he alone, in whom is all hope of life and virtue? Therefore full Ecclus. xxiv. well doth Christ call so many as labour and are loaden with the burden of sin to him, Matt. xii. and promiseth that he will refresh them, that is to say, absolve and deliver them from their sins.

Hereto belongeth the saying of blessed John Baptist: "Behold that Lamb of God, John i. which taketh away the sin of the world." Here blessed Baptist confesseth, that it is Christ alone which absolveth and taketh away the sin of the world. Doth not also the holy evangelist, St John, in the aforesaid chapter, call Christ that "true light, which lighteneth every man that cometh into this world?" What other thing is it to lighten, than to put away the clouds of sins, and to send into our hearts the radiant and glistening beams of the eternal Son, which is the knowledge of God's most holy will? And this, saith St John, is the office of Christ alone.

Why doth Christ call so many as thirst unto him, and promiseth that floods of Isai. lv. livish water shall flow out of their bellies; yea, and that he will give them the water John vii. of life freely; but only to shew that whosoever is thirsty, and heartily desireth remission Rev. xxii. of sins, must with all haste come to him, and say with the psalmograph, "Like as the Psal. xliii. hart desireth the water-brooks, so longeth my soul after thee, O God: my soul is athirst for God, yea, even for the living God," &c.? Furthermore, Christ commandeth that "repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name." Where we Luke xxiv. may learn that forgiveness of sin cometh only by the name of Christ.

And in the Acts of the Apostles we find, that when any famous and notable act or miracle was done, the people, as many at this day, did ascribe it to the virtue and power of the apostles, willing to do sacrifice unto them for it; but the apostles did reject and cast away all such immerited honour and undeserved praise, contending and Acts iv. xiv. mainly labouring to persuade the people, that whatsoever was done came not to pass by their power, but by the virtue of Jesu Christ, whom God raised up from death. And when they made mention of remission of sins, they did never remember and rehearse their own power to forgive sin, but only preached that so many as believed and were baptized into the remission of sins should be absolved and freely forgiven by the name of Jesu Christ. And in the Acts of the Apostles blessed Peter plainly confesseth, that Acts x. there is no health, no life, no remission of sins, but in Christ alone, and that "there is Acts iv. none other name given unto men under heaven, wherein they must be saved," but the name of Jesu Christ alone.

Neither did the apostles absolve any otherwise than by the preaching of God's word, which when it was heard and believed, then were the diligent hearers and faithful believers of the same truly absolved, as Christ saith: "Now are ye clean for the word's sake that I have spoken unto you;" that is, "Now are ye delivered from your sins because ye have believed my preaching."

John xv.

"The faith of the heart justifieth," saith St Paul. Where it may be learned that, if faith be not given to the word, there is no absolution or deliverance from sin. "For whatsoever is not of faith is sin;" and where faith is not, there abideth the wrath of God, as holy John Baptist saith: "He that believeth the Son hath everlasting life; but he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth upon him." Therefore, before Christ absolved any man of his sins, he did behold and see whether he had faith or not. If Christ found true faith in his heart, then he always said, "Thy faith hath saved thee."

Rom. x.

Rom. xiv.

John iiii.

Matt. viii. ix.

xv.

Mark v. ix.

Luke xvii.

xviii.

John xi.

Jer. xvii.

Psal. vii.

Rev. ii.

Seeing then that none can search the heart, whether it be faithful or unfaithful, but God alone; seeing also that the absolution beareth no strength but where faith is, it followeth that none can absolve me of my sins, but that Lord alone which "searcheth the reins and the heart." The priest is only God's minister, appointed of God (if he be truly sent) to preach that absolution and free deliverance from my sin, through the name of Jesu Christ; which preaching if I believe, I am so sure to be delivered from all my sins, as though Christ himself had said unto me, "I freely absolve thee," or, "Thy sins are forgiven thee for thy faith's sake in my name." Are not these the words of Christ, which is the self truth and cannot lie, spoken to all faithful ministers? "He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me."

But let us rehearse more scriptures, although to any christian heart these, which hitherto I have recited, may seem abundantly to suffice. Blessed Paul, in his epistle to the Romans, proveth manifestly that God alone justifieth us. If our justification cometh from God alone, then followeth it well that the remission of our sins cometh from God alone also. For remission of sins goeth before justification. By Christ's death are we delivered from our sins; but by his resurrection are we justified and made righteous. So doth it evidently appear, that it is God alone which both remitteth the sin, and also justifieth the sinner for Christ's sake, which is our righteousness. Again, the aforesaid apostle saith that God hath not only given us his Son, but also all things with him: ergo, absolution of sins. So see we that God alone absolveth and forgiveth us our sins for Christ's sake.

Rom. viii.

Rom. iv.

1 Cor. i.

Rom. viii.

Gal. i.

1 Cor. vi.

Eph. i.

Col. i.

James i.

St Paul to the Galatians affirmeth, that Christ "gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world;" that is to say, from all evil in this present world. Ergo, God alone it is which delivereth us from our sins in this vale of misery. "Ye are washed away from your sins," saith he, "yea, ye are sanctified and made righteous by the name of the Lord Jesu, and by the Spirit of our God." Ergo, our absolution, our deliverance from sin, our sanctification, our justification, and all that ever good is, cometh from God through Jesu Christ our Lord. Again he saith: "God the Father hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings:" ergo, with the blessing of absolution and free deliverance from all our sins. God "hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and carried us into the kingdom of his well-beloved Son, by whom we have redemption, even by his blood, remission of sins." Ergo, by Christ's blood are we absolved and delivered from our sins. "Every good gift and every perfect gift," saith James, "cometh from above, and descendeth from the Father of light." Ergo, absolution, which is a good and perfect gift, cometh down from the Father of light.

1 John i.

Blessed John in his epistle saith: "If we confess our sins, God is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to make us clean from all iniquity." Here St John affirmeth that God forgiveth us our sins, and maketh us clean from all unrighteousness. He saith also, that "the blood of Jesu Christ, God's own Son, maketh us clean from all sin." And in the chapter following he saith: "If any man sinneth, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesu Christ, that righteous one. And he it is that obtaineth mercy for our sins, not for our sins only, but for all the world also." Again he saith:

1 John ii.

“I write unto you, O ye little children, that your sins are forgiven you for Christ’s name sake.” Here see again that by Christ remission of sins cometh to us from God the Father. Moreover, blessed John in his Revelation writeth on this manner. Christ hath “loved us, and washed us from our sins by his blood.” Here see we that all our sins be washed away by Christ’s blood alone. Rev. i.

What should I write more? If I go forth to gather together all the places of holy scripture that prove the absolution of our sins to come from God alone, I should not only trouble the most godly reader, but also write a volume longer than the Iliads of the Greek poet Homer, when to any christian judgment I may justly seem already to have proved my article true and sufficiently christian, unto the great shame of all these papists, which cease not with their stentoreous voices to speak evil of the true preachers of God’s word, and to obscure or deface the glory of God.

Take away the power of only remitting sins from God; and what remaineth there wherefore we should confess ourselves bound to him? I speak matters concerning the salvation of our souls. If all that be of the shaven nation have power to absolve men of their sins at their pleasure, and to remit or retain whose iniquities it pleaseth them, then is God well promoted, even out of the hall into the kitchen, as they use to say. So should it also follow, that so many as pleased the priests should have their sins forgiven them, and so be saved; otherwise not. O intolerable blasphemy! But as God alone remitted the sins of the fathers of the old testament, so in like manner doth he now in the new testament. Who absolved Mary Magdalene from her sins, but Christ? Who forgave the thief his robbery and manslaughter, but Christ? Who had compassion on Peter, when he had denied his Master Christ, but Christ? Who made of Matthew, the publican and toll-gatherer, a faithful apostle and preacher, but Christ? Who is that good shepherd that fetcheth home the stray sheep lovingly upon his shoulders unto the sheepfold? is it not Christ, which saith of himself, “I am that good shepherd: a good shepherd giveth his life for sheep?” Who received home joyfully the lost son? was it not Christ? Who healed the wounded man? the priest or the Levite? or rather Christ the Samaritan? Who made of Saul the persecutor Paul an apostle? was it not Christ? Who absolved all these, with many other in the scripture, from their sins, but Christ alone, the Son of the living God? Doth not all power belong to Christ, both in heaven and in earth? To him therefore alone doth the power of remitting sin pertain. Seeing then that this is true, and nothing more true, why may we not be bold to say, maugre the papists, that God alone absolveth the truly penitent, and only remitteth the sins of so many as with an unfeigned faith convert and flee unto his mercy? Luke vii.
Luke xxii.
Matt. ix.
Luke xv.
John x.
Luke xv.
Luke x.
Matt. xxviii.

I could allege divers sentences out of the holy doctors of Christ’s church, which maintain this doctrine; but, seeing I fight not for the advancement of man, but for the glory of God, I will not enforce this my work with man’s doctrine, but with the infallible verity of God’s word. For I know that every man is a liar; but God is true, and his word abideth for evermore. Psal. cxvi.
Isai. xl.

Now will I prepare myself to the second part of this¹ treatise, and afterward make answer to the objections of the adversaries, that God may still remain a glorious God in the presence of all men, and all other recounted dust and ashes in comparison of him.

The second part of this treatise is this: as concerning the priest, he forgiveth not the sin, but only is a minister of God, appointed to utter and declare that free remission of sins purchased for us of God the Father by the most precious blood of Jesu Christ. This maketh the papists to cry, *Ad ignem, ad ignem*. For this doctrine plucketh them down one staff lower than they were before. They may now become no more checkmate with God. For before they were not only not contented to be his ministers, but also they would be ‘hail fellow well-met’ with him. Now shall they be fain, either to be the messengers and servants of God, or else plain anti-christs and papists. But let us see what the scripture saith. That the priest forgiveth not sin, but God alone, it is sufficiently proved before. Now must we learn The second part.

[¹ So the edition of 1550: the folio has *his*.]

of the holy scriptures, whether the priest be but only a minister appointed of God to utter and declare that absolution and free deliverance from sin, or not. That this is his office, it is manifest by divers places of the new testament.

Mark xvi. When Christ sent forth his disciples, he said unto them on this manner: "Go into the universal world, and preach the gospel to every creature: whoso shall believe and be baptized, he shall be saved; but whoso will not believe shall be condemned." Here is it evident enough what authority priests have, and what their office is; verily to preach the gospel and to baptize. Mark that they must preach the gospel, as St Paul saith: "Christ sent me not only to baptize, but to preach the gospel." Again: 1 Cor. i. "Wo is unto me, if I preach not the gospel." And in the description of a spiritual 1 Cor. ix. minister he sheweth that such one ought to be chosen, as is not only learned, but also "apt to teach," "able to exhort with wholesome doctrine, and to convince or overcome them that speak against the truth of Christ's gospel." And St Peter saith: "Ye 1 Tim. iii. elders, feed the flock of Christ, so much as in you is." Tit. i. 1 Pet. v.

What it is to preach the gospel. John iii. What other thing is it to preach the gospel, than to declare unto the people that their sins be forgiven them freely of God, if they repent and believe in Christ, as it is written, "He that believeth the Son hath everlasting life?" If sins be forgiven of God, and the ministers commanded to declare the same to the people, then doth it follow that they forgive not the sin, but only are ministers appointed of God to publish that benefit of our salvation. If a prince pardoneth his subject for his treason committed against his person, and sendeth his letters of favour to the traitor by one of his faithful servants, commanding him to declare his pitiful mercy to the guilty; who forgiveth the fault, the messenger or the king? I am sure it will be answered, The king. And not unjustly. For the prince alone pardoneth: the messenger only declareth his prince's pleasure to the traitor. Even so all we have offended and worthily deserved eternal death. Now the good pleasure of our most mighty prince is to forgive us even of his own free mercy, without our deserts or merits, for Christ's sake; and that his unspeakable goodness toward mankind may be known, he hath appointed his ministers to publish it abroad. The sum of their commission is this, that whosoever will repent his former life, and believe to have remission of their sins, through the mercy of God in Jesu Christ our Lord, they shall be forgiven. The ministers of God publish these joyful news, exhort unto repentance and faith. The people repent and believe: their sins are forgiven. Who forgiveth the sins of the faithful repentant? The granter of the commission, or the declarer thereof? God or man? I doubt not but that ye will answer, God. If God alone, whom we offend, forgiveth the sin, and not the declarers of the forgiveness, I have gotten that I have deserved for the probation of the second part of this little treatise.

John xx. But let us hear what Christ saith: "As my Father sent me, so send I you." Now, I pray you, how was Christ sent, and for what purpose? Let us hear what he himself saith; and then shall I be blameless. By the prophet Esay he speaketh on this manner: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me; to preach the gospel to the poor he hath sent me, to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captive, and sight to the blind, freely to set at liberty them that are bruised, and to preach the acceptable year of the Lord." Again he saith: Isai. lxi. Luke iv. "I must preach the glad and joyful tidings of the kingdom of God to other cities also; for therefore am I sent." Luke iv. Mark i. "Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also; for therefore am I come." All these sentences declare manifestly, that Christ was sent to preach the kingdom of God, that is to say, free deliverance from sin to so many as repent and believe. If they will not be above Christ, they must be contented to preach the will of the celestial Father as he was, and not to take upon them that thing whereof only they are ministers.

Doth not St Paul, James, Peter, and Jude, call themselves the servants of Jesu Christ in all their epistles, declaring thereby that they are not the self master, by whom remission and absolution of sins cometh; but only the ministers of him, which infundeth² and poureth into all men grace, favour, remission of sins, and everlasting

[¹ Folio, of.]

[² Infundeth: the same as poureth into.]

life? There is but "one Master, that is to say, Christ:" the other are servants, as Matt. xxiii. St Paul witnesseth: "We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesu the Lord, and we 2 Cor. iv. your servants for Jesus' sake." Again: "Let a man on this wise esteem us, even as 1 Cor. iv. the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the secrets of God."

All these texts declare manifestly that priests, if they be true ministers, and not rather idols, are nothing but ministers and servants appointed of God to declare unto the christian congregation, that free remission of sins cometh unto us from God alone, through the glorious name of Jesu Christ; so far is it off that the priests contrary to their commission can forgive sins, whose office consisteth in declaring, and not in giving, remission of sins. Therefore let them be contented no more from henceforth arrogantly to arrogate that unto them, which pertain to God alone, but humbly confess that God only forgiveth the sin, and that they are but commissioners, appointed of God, to publish and set forth the same, I mean the remission of sins given to the faithful penitent of God alone.

Neither let them frown at this doctrine, which setteth them in their right place, but rather (as it becometh good and faithful servants) let them give the glory of our salvation to God alone, and be glad that they are called unto so worthy and honourable office to declare the mysteries of God to the people, whose preachings or sermons whosoever believeth, may be so certainly assured of the remission of their sins, as though God himself had said unto them, Your sins are forgiven you. For this saying of Christ is an infallible verity: "He that heareth you heareth me."

Luke x.

Now let us behold the objections of the papists, and briefly confute them, that all the glory may be the Lord's. First, they allege this saying of Christ: "Loosen him, and let him go away." Again: "Loosen them, and bring them unto me." Here is simple poor shift to prove their absolution, when they are compelled to flee unto the untying of a vile sheet, and loosening of a simple rude ass. Look, wheresoever the papists find any word that cometh of this verb *solvo*, that maketh for absolution straightways. I marvel how this escaped them, *Solve quod debes*. I think, if *Salve regina* had been turned into *Solve regina*, as some of them that be not very fine-mouthed pronounce it, they would not have been ashamed to have alleged it for absolution, even as some of the papists do, which, wheresoever they find *ignis*, take it for purgatory straightways. O noble doctors of tyrology³, rather than of theology!

The third part. John xi.

Matt. xxi.

Matt. xviii.

As concerning the first text, which is that Christ commanded that Lazarus should be let loose, and suffered freely to go his way; if they will gather their absolution of that, it may then be proved that all other men and women have that same power so well as they. For there were at that time present, not only the disciples of Christ, but also divers Jews with certain women, which I am sure were not all priests. Have they not made a good market? they have brought a shilling to ninepence, yea, rather to nothing. They have done fair by themselves, by my fay. While they labour to make themselves gods, and to excel all other in dignity, they go so wisely to work, that they have made themselves equal to the most inferior. O crafty daubers! Which of them all is able to prove that Christ spake these words, "Loosen him and let him go," rather to his disciples than to all the other indifferently? I think rather that he spake them to the women, as most commonly occupied about such things. But to whom he spake, the text maketh no mention; therefore can they prove nothing.

As touching the loosening of the ass, who seeth not their foolishness? The occasion why Christ sent the disciples for the ass was not to give them power to loosen men from their sins at their pleasure, but to fulfil the prophecy of Zachary, which so long before prophesied that Christ should come riding meekly upon an ass, contrary to the expectation of the ambitious and vain-glorious Jews. What is this to the purpose? Whereas Christ by this example teacheth humility, the papists gather pride. Christ submitteth himself even with the most lowest; and they exalt themselves with the Most Highest, yea, "above all that is called God or that is worshipped, and sit in the temple of God, and shew themselves as God." Tell me, good reader, are not these sweet allegory-makers? I would they would once cease to moralize; for they have lied too long.

Matt. xxi.

Zech. ix.

2 Thess. iii.

³ Tyrology: instruction for mere beginners. But is *pyrology* intended?

Matt. xvi. Some of them also allege this saying of Christ: "Whatsoever thou shalt bind on the earth shall be also bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loosen on earth shall be loosened in heaven." Here they esteem themselves more than gods. By this text they think they may do whatsoever pleaseth them, save or condemn, bind or loose, hold up or cast down, build or subvert, bring to heaven or cast down to hell; but if the good men would take the pains to look what goeth before, their comb should soon be plucked down, they would not make so much of their painted sheath. Christ saith a little before: "I will give thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven." He saith not: "I give thee." Christ in this place only promised the keys to the congregation, and performed his promise after his resurrection, as we may see in the gospel of John. Hereof may the papists right well perceive that this text, whereof hitherto they have so greatly gloried, and out of the which they have sucked so great advantage, maketh little unto the advancement of their feigned power.

Note well. Their last and most strong bulwark, where the keys were given to the true ministers, is this text: "Whosoever sins ye forgive, they are forgiven unto them: and whosoever's sins ye retain, they are retained." Here they triumph and persuade themselves that they have gotten the victory, though they never fight stroke. But if they will be favourable to God, and work no injury to the other scriptures afore rehearsed, they shall have no cause to lift up their bristles. Christ speaketh here after the manner of our speech, which diligently must be noted, unless we will deprive God of his glory. When we see a man restored to his health, which long before hath been vexed of some grievous disease, and is made whole through the diligence of some physician, we use to say, 'Doctor Turner made this man whole, or Doctor Byl, or some other,' which is expert in that kind of science; and yet is it not the doctor that made him whole, but rather the emplastures and medicines that he ministered unto him, yea, rather God, if we will speak truly, which gave such virtue to his creatures to work health unto the sick. So doth the scripture speak. Sometime it attributeth our health to the ministers of the word, as in this aforesaid place, sometime and most commonly to God himself, as we tofore have abundantly heard, and sometime to the word of God, as it is written: "Now are ye clean for the word's sake which I have spoken unto you." Item: "Neither herb nor emplastrure hath healed them; but thy word, O Lord, that healeth all things." Hereto pertaineth the saying of the psalmograph: "He sent his word and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions;" and yet doth God only make us whole, and forgive us our sins; as he himself witnesseth by the prophet, saying: "Thy destruction, O Israel, cometh of thyself: only of me cometh thy help and salvation."

John xv. What can be more plainly spoken? Who is able once to hiss against these things? Who will once open his mouth to bark against this doctrine? No man, I suppose, except he be altogether drowned in papism. This, therefore, is the true meaning of the aforesaid text. Whosoever the ministers of the Lord's word declare unto me the sweet promises of God the Father made to me in Christ's blood, and I believe them, then are my sins forgiven me at the very instant; but if I do not believe them, then are my sins retained, that is to say, not forgiven. And forasmuch as I either repent and believe, or else continue still in mine old damnable state, at the preaching of the Lord's ministers; therefore the scripture attributeth my deliverance from sin or otherwise to them, when notwithstanding God alone remitteth my sin, if I repent and believe. If I do not, the uncircumcision of my heart, that is, my incredulity and unfaithfulness, is the occasion that my sins are retained and not forgiven. For this saying alway must needs abide true: "Thy destruction, O Israel, cometh of thyself: only of me cometh thy help and salvation." So that the priests (I mean the ministers of God's word) are counted to forgive sin, when they preach to the truly repentant¹ remission of sins through Christ, and to retain sin, when they declare to the unfaithful damnation, and that the wrath of God abideth upon them, so long as they remain still in their incredulity and unfaithfulness, as it is written: "He that believeth not on the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth upon him."

[¹ So the smaller edition reads. Folio, to thee truly repentance.]

Thus see we that those texts of the holy scripture, which the papists allege for the maintenance of their feigned and usurped power in remitting sin, maketh nothing for their purpose, if they be truly alleged and understand, according to the vein of the holy scriptures. The scriptures of God may not be rent and torn, neither hacked nor wrested to serve the private affects of men; but every text must be so weighed, pondered, alleged, and understand, that it may agree with the other texts of the holy bible, that all the glory of our salvation may be ascribed to God alone, which is both the beginner and finisher of all our health: to him therefore be all honour and praise for ever. Amen.

Now will I make haste to the last part of this treatise, which requireth that I should express my mind concerning the keys which Christ before his passion promised to his church, and after his resurrection performed his promise; and shew by the sacred scriptures that the gift of the keys is no vain and idle gift, but a necessary, joyful, and comfortable treasure. For the papists will here object, If remission of sins cometh from God alone, then were the keys given to the congregation in vain. But to the intent that I may stop the mouths of the adversaries, and that they may have no occasion to bark against the glory of God after this, mark well, good reader, what shall be spoken.

Truth it is that God alone teacheth men his verity by the Holy Ghost, as it is written: "All shall be taught of God." Again: "I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy." The psalmograph also saith: "I will hear what the Lord speaketh in me;" yet will he that they should be studious of the holy scriptures, both day and night, as it is commanded of Christ, "Search the scriptures," and also diligently hear the preaching of his word, as it is written: "He that is of God heareth the words of God." "My sheep hear my voice." "Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice."

So in like manner, although God alone remitteth all sin, yet will he that remission of sins should be preached to the people, that by this means they may repent, believe, and be made whole, as Christ testifieth, saying: "It behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise again from death the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations." "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." For the ministers of the gospel are the organs and instruments of Christ, by whom God worketh through his holy Spirit health and salvation in so many as are predestinate unto eternal life. They are "God's labourers," and "ministers, by whom we believe, even as the Lord giveth every man grace." They are the orators, messengers, interpreters, angels, apostles, and ambassadors of the Lord, as the apostle saith: "All things are of God, which hath reconciled unto himself by Jesu Christ, and hath given us the office to preach the atonement. For God was in Christ, and reconciled the world unto himself, and imputed not their sins unto them, and among us hath he set up the word of atonement. Now then are we messengers in the room of Christ, even as though God exhorted by us. We beseech you now therefore in Christ's stead, that ye be at one with God." Again to the Galatians he writeth on this manner: "Ye did not despise nor abhor me, but received me as an angel of God, yea, even as Christ Jesu." Hereto pertaineth his saying to the Thessalonians: "He that casteth away us casteth not away men, but God, which hath given his holy Spirit into us." Moyses also, in times past, said unto the people that murmured against him: "The Lord hath heard your grudging and murmuring, wherewith ye murmur against him. For what are we? your murmurings are not against us, but against the Lord." So likewise read we in the gospel, that the Lord spake of his ministers: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that receiveth whomsoever I shall send receiveth me: and he that receiveth me receiveth him also that sent me." Again he saith: "He that heareth you heareth me, and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him also that sent me."

Here see we that the ministers of God's word are not to be despised; for they are necessary instruments unto the health of men, and they are "worthy of double honour," as the apostle saith. Therefore may it be concluded that the absolution of the priest is not to be despised; seeing it is none other thing, if it be a true and christian absolution, than the preaching of free remission of our sins in Christ's name.

The fourth and last part. Matt. xvi. John xx.

Isat. liv. Jer. xxxi. John vi. Heb. viii. Joel ii. Acts ii. Psal. i. John v.

John viii. John x. John xviii.

Luke xxiv.

Rom. x.

1 Cor. iii.

2 Cor. v.

Gal. iv.

1 Thess. iv.

Exod. xvi.

Matt. x.

Luke x.

The ministers of God's word ought to be had in honour. 1 Tim. v. What the absolution is.

1 Cor. iii. And although he that planteth be nothing, and he that watereth be nothing, but God which giveth the increase; again, albeit the Lord blesseth us with all spiritual benediction; yet, inasmuch as the inestimable kindness and manifold benefits of God toward us cannot be known nor believed without preaching (for "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God"), therefore hath God appointed his ministers to open and declare unto men those excellent mysteries, those comfortable and joyful promises of God's mercy and good-will toward mankind, that they may perceive, learn, and understand, what is given them of the Lord, what they ought to believe, how they should obtain the gifts of God, and lead a life worthy the kindness of so bounteous a Father: God also hath appointed the ministers to beget men in Christ Jesu by the gospel, to open the eyes of the blind, to turn them from darkness to light, "to convert the hearts of fathers into children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous." He hath commanded them "to preach repentance and remission of sins in his name unto all nations." "Go your way," saith he, "into the world universal, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved: he that believeth not shall be condemned."

Luke i.

Luke xxiv.

Mark xvi.

Matt. xvi.

Moreover, he hath given to his faithful ministers the keys of the kingdom of heaven, that whatsoever they loosen in earth may be also loosened in heaven; and whatsoever they bind in earth may also be bound in heaven: that is to say, he hath committed to them the office of preaching the gospel, that they should go forth into the world, and preach unto all men the grace and favour that is given of God the Father for Christ's sake; yea, and that they should proclaim, publish, and set abroad unto all men, that so many as repent and believe are loosened from the captivity of Satan, purged from sin, delivered from death, and made inheritors of eternal life; again, that so many as believe not remain still the captives and bond-slaves of Satan, and continue bound in their sins and in the state of damnation, and that therefore they shall die the death, and for evermore be damned, except they repent, turn, and believe. And thus their preaching is so certain and sure before God, that whatsoever they pronounce, being conformable to the word of God, shall as certainly come to pass, as though God himself had spoken it.

As for an example, whensoever the ministers and preachers of God's word in this world shall declare to the faithful repentance, remission of sins, and tell them that they be loosened from the captivity of Satan, it is even as certain and sure, as though God himself had said these words unto them: "Thy sins are forgiven thee." In like manner, when they shall say to the unfaithful, that they remain still bound in their sin, and that the wrath of God abideth upon them, and therefore they shall be damned; God approveth their saying, and it shall undoubtedly come to pass according to their preaching. So that whatsoever the minister of God's word saith, according to the word of God, ought to be received with great reverence, and taken as an oracle sent down from heaven, and undoubtedly believed as a manifest and infallible verity of God.

And this preaching of remitting or retaining sins are the keys of the kingdom of heaven, which Christ promised his apostles before his death, as we may see in Matthew, and after his resurrection performed his promise, as we read in the gospel of St John.

And by a metaphor Christ calleth the preaching of his word a key. For as a key hath two properties, one to shut, another to open, so hath the word of God. It openeth to the faithful the treasure of the gifts of God, grace, mercy, favour, remission of sins, quietness of conscience, and everlasting life; but to the unfaithful it shutteth all his treasures, and suffereth them to receive none of them all, so long as they persist and remain in their incredulity and unfaithfulness. These keys are given to so many as, being truly called unto the office of ministration, preach the word of God. They loosen, that is to say, they preach to the faithful remission of sins by Christ. They also bind, that is, they declare to the unfaithful damnation. But he that preacheth not the word of God can neither bind or loose, though he challenge never so great dignity, authority, and power. For Christ calleth it "the key of knowledge." And the prophet saith: "The lips of a priest keep knowledge, and at his mouth shall they require the law; for he is the angel or messenger of the Lord of hosts." Therefore where there is no knowledge, there is no key: and where there is no key, there is neither opening nor shutting, that is, neither binding nor loosening.

What the keys of the kingdom of heaven are. Matt. xvi. John xx.

Why the preaching of God's word is likened to a key.

Note.

Luke xi.

Mal. ii.

Here let all men judge what is to be thought of the papists' absolution, whereof they crack so much, which also they sell so dearly. If no remission of sins cometh from them, but by preaching God's word, it followeth that their absolution availeth but little, seeing they never preach, neither the law of God, nor the sweet promises of him, but only mumble a few words in the Latin tongue, yea, and those, as not understood, so likewise many times contrary to the divine scriptures and the glory of God. Miserable doubtless is that congregation which hath a blind guide to their curate, which hath neither the gift nor the knowledge of preaching. For "if the blind leadeth the blind, both fall into the ditch." Matt. xv. Again, greatly fortunate is that parish, and highly blessed of God, to whom a learned shepherd hath chanced, which can feed them with knowledge and doctrine. Whatsoever they shall hear of such a learned and godly minister, let them believe it as a voice coming down from heaven. And so oft as by such a shepherd remission of sins in the blood of Christ is preached unto the congregation, let them esteem that preaching none otherwise than if the Lord himself had preached it. Let them stedfastly believe the word of God, and undoubtedly by their faith, through the grace of God, they shall obtain remission of all their sins. Contrariwise, if they believe not, their sins are retained and by no means forgiven.

These things have I spoken concerning the absolution or the keys, which consisteth only in preaching God's word, that the papists may have no occasion justly to bark against me, as they have done hitherto both for my sermons and books. God forgive them, and send them a better mind!

Now, forasmuch as the true and christian absolution is nothing else but the preaching of free deliverance from sin by the death of Jesu Christ, it ought not to be contemned and despised, but rather to be received with great humility and reverence, even as a divine oracle, "sent down from the Father of lights." For no man can express Absolution, what it is. James i. how greatly it comforteth infirm and weak consciences, which are troubled with the fear of God's judgments.

When the prophet Nathan came unto king David, and rebuked him for slaying 2 Sam. xii. David. Urias the Hethite, and for taking his wife Bethsabe unto his wife, and told him how greatly God was angry with him, and what plagues should fall upon his house, yea, upon himself, for his wickedness, it is not to be doubted but that David was stricken with a wonderful great heaviness, and his heart pierced with an inward sorrow; insomuch that he was right ashamed of himself, of his fault, of his wickedness, and was compelled even of conscience to brast out into the knowledge of his sin, and to say: "I have sinned against the Lord." As David was now full of sorrow, grief, trouble, disquietness in his heart, and had joy of nothing, (unto such shame and confusion was he brought in his conscience,) so likewise it is not to be doubted but that he was wonderfully revived, marvellously restored unto the peace and quietness of his conscience, yea, and plenteously replenished with joy in his mind, when the prophet said these words unto him: "The Lord hath put away thy sin: thou shalt not die."

Mary Magdalene was a famous sinner; and when she heard her unclean conversation rebuked by the word of God, she heartily repented, and was replenished with an inward sorrow, lamenting greatly that she had offended so bounteous a Lord and merciful God; insomuch that a large fountain of tears flowed out of her tender eyes. All this time undoubtedly her sorrow was greater than it can be here expressed. But when she heard this comfortable absolution of our Saviour Christ, Luke vii. Mary Magdalene. *Remittuntur tibi peccata*; "Thy sins are forgiven thee;" again, "Thy faith hath made thee safe; go thy way in peace," that is to say, with a quiet and merry conscience; O good God! who is able to express with how great joy and singular solace she was affected? So sure and comfortable is it to weak and troubled consciences to hear the sweet and comfortable words of our free deliverance from the grievous burden of sins by Christ's blood.

The thief was full of great anguish and trouble in his conscience when he hanged Luke xxiii. upon the cross in the time of Christ's passion, and confessed that both he and his fellow-thief suffered worthily, even according to their deserts; and in the midst of his troubled conscience, he cried unto the Lord Christ on this manner, saying: "Lord, remember me, when thou comest into thy kingdom." But when Christ had made him answer and said, "Verily, I say unto thee, this day shalt thou be with me in

paradise," O with what a quiet conscience suffered he his pains, and with how glad an heart yielded he up his spirit into the hands of the eternal Father! So comfortable a thing is it to a troubled conscience for to hear any thing that may quiet it.

Acts ii.

Again, when blessed Peter preached unto the Jews, and told them, that they had crucified Christ the Lord, the scripture saith that "they were pricked in their hearts, and said unto Peter and unto the other apostles, Ye men and brethren, what shall we do? Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." As they were greatly dismayed when the holy apostle opened unto them their malicious fact in slaying Christ the Lord, so were they very much comforted when they heard of St Peter that there was hope of their sins to be forgiven, so that they repented them of their wickedness, and were baptized in the name of Jesu Christ.

1 Cor. v.

With how entire and unspeakable sorrow is it to be thought that the famous and notable adulterer among the Corinthians was overwhelmed, when at the commandment of St Paul he was delivered unto Satan, excommunicate, put out of the christian company, and reputed among them as an ethnick and publican! Contrariwise, with what exceeding joy was he replenished, when after his repentance and sorrow he heard the sweet promises of God's mercy declared unto him, that lieth bent out toward all sinners that repent in faith, and afterward was received into the company of the faithful Christians!

2 Cor. ii.

I pass over divers other histories, both of the old and new testament, which do abundantly declare what great comfort the faithful penitent sinners have always had in hearing the comfortable promises of God's mercy.

Now the absolution being, as I said before, nothing else but the preaching of free deliverance from sin by the death of Jesu Christ (for God alone forgiveth sin and absolveth the faithful penitent), it ought not to be contemned and despised; but whenever the minister of the Lord's word, be it privately or openly, shall rehearse unto men the sweet and comfortable words of God's mercy toward all them that repent in faith, they ought to give earnest faith unto them, being undoubtedly persuaded that their sins at that time be assuredly forgiven them, as though God himself had spoken these words, according to this saying of Christ: "He that heareth you heareth me."

Matt. x.
Luke x.

But it were expedient that all true ministers should pray, that their form or manner of absolution be pure and agreeable to the vein of the holy scriptures, without the intermixture of any man's authority in remitting sin, either of Peter, Paul, Francis, Dominick, Benet, or any other, or yet of themselves; again, that it be declared to the penitent that God alone forgiveth the sin, and that the priests are but the ministers of God, to whom he hath given the keys of the kingdom of heaven, for to shew to the true penitent loosening, that is to say, remission of their sins; to the obstinate and hard-hearted sinners binding, that is, that they remain still in the danger of damnation, and shall be damned, except they repent and believe.

It would also be provided, that when the faithful penitent is desirous to have his conscience confirmed, established, and comforted with the word of God, it should not be mumbled in the Latin tongue, as the papists have hitherto used in their absolutions, but in the mother tongue, that the idiot¹ and unlearned may understand it, and be edified. Or else what faith shall he conceive in his heart? How shall he repent? How shall he know the goodness of God toward sinners? How shall he arm himself with faith against Satan, sin, and desperation? How shall he prepare himself to give God thanks for his kindness, and live worthy of his profession? God grant that all things may be done unto his glory, and unto the profit of his holy congregation!

Here hast thou, most godly reader, my mind concerning the absolution and forgiveness of sins; which, if it be examined by the scriptures of God, all man's doctrine set apart, I doubt not but it will stand so strong that the gates of hell shall not once be able to prevail against it. Farewell, most gentle reader, and pray that the Lord's word may have free passage, that the name of the great God and our Saviour Jesu Christ may be glorified among all nations, and that, all dissension laid aside, we may agree in one faith and one truth. Amen.

Give the glory to God alone.

[¹ Idiot: a private or unlearned person.]