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THE  
"CONFOUNDED" CONVERT.

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**A**LAMENTABLE want of tact ordinarily disfigures the conduct of those whose friends or relatives exhibit tendencies Rome-wards. A very limited knowledge of human nature is enough to convince us that, neither in early childhood nor in after life, is opposition of much avail. Even when we are under the influence of a mere whim, remonstrance, however well meant, generally increases our craving for the coveted object, and engenders malevolent feelings towards our opponents.

When I was a child my father took me, when long evenings were setting in, to buy a paint-box in a large repository. While he was selecting one, my eyes had fallen upon a large, clumsy, wooden horse, to which I took a violent fancy, and implored my father to buy me *that* instead of the paint-box. He did not choose a moment so inappropriate for preaching a sermon, but instantly bought the horse and helped me to draw it home. The wheels were too small and too slight, so the horse fell down several times. Not a disparaging word did my father utter; he picked it up, and said he would make some nice, new wheels.

In two or three days the whim was over; I was tired of my horse, and wanted a paint-box. With a lamentable absence of generosity, I asked my father why he had not bought the paint-box. "Because,"

said he, "you had set your mind upon a horse, and though I knew you would get tired of it, I wished you to choose for yourself." "But why did not you tell me I should get tired of it?" persisted I. "Because," said he, "your head was too full of the horse to listen to reason. You would have disliked the paint-box just then; you would have thought me unkind; besides, I do not want you to use *my* eyes, I want you to learn to act for yourself; if *you* think you have made a bad choice I am very glad of it, and we will see about the paint-box at once." Older folks take fancies to *real* horses, and can papa restrain them?

People are never so much in earnest as when their religious feelings are aroused, and all hostile measures are worse than useless. Those who begin to doubt are in a fair way; they have then begun to *think*, and the more they think upon religious matters, the more they will doubt. People retain their old creeds because they rarely think them out. "Think wrongly if you please," says Lessing, "but think for *yourself*." From the moment a man begins to think, the horizon clears, and though he may be destined to wander in a maze of dogmas for years, his ultimate conclusions will, if he be worth anything and continue to *think*, land him as far away from Rome as his most zealous friends could wish.

Regret, if you will, the tediousness of the process, but do not retard it by coarse ridicule and impolitic opposition. Assist him, on the contrary, to dive deeply into the heart of Rome. Depend upon it, if once he get into it, he is sure to get out of it, and though he may travel thither by slow and easy stages, he will assuredly return by express.

Many, perhaps most, born Catholics and superficial converts stagnate in the Pontine marshes merely because they give themselves no trouble. With one decade of the Rosary, and one chapter of the Imita-

tion daily, one Mass weekly, and three confessions and communions yearly, a person may go dithering on in respectable orthodoxy, tormenting neither himself nor his neighbours with his spiritual concerns.

But the zeal of an earnest, conscientious, thoughtful convert should never be suffered to flag; that is to say, if those to whom he is near and dear are anxious to see him emancipated from his fetters. He should not be thwarted but seconded, not coarsely and scornfully, but with great tact and discretion. It will be of the utmost service to him to go daily to Mass, to confess at least once a week, to communicate very frequently, to say five Mysteries of the Rosary and the Little Office every evening, to try to gain every Indulgence offered, to wear the five Scapulars, the miraculous medal and an Agnus Dei, and to become a tertiary of one of the religious orders in "the world." If very enthusiastic he should procure the Little Office, extracted from the works of St. Bonaventura, in which the Psalms of David and the Te Deum are adapted to *Mary*—"O come let us sing unto our *Lady*," "Holy, Holy, Holy, *Mary* Mother of God." This Office is said daily by the priests of the Pious Society of the Missions, and may be had *gratis* at the Italian Church.

He should often serve at Benediction, and thus become conversant with candle ends and decoration dodges. He should be encouraged to walk in religious processions after a tottering doll with a lighted candle in his hand, singing the Litany of our *Lady*. His reading should not be confined to the *Lamp*, and other trashy serials; he should make himself thoroughly acquainted with S. Thomas Aquinas, Bossuet, Liguori, &c. For a while it would do him immense good to confine himself exclusively to the Lives of the Saints, selecting those compiled by the Fathers of the Oratory, and beginning with *Saint Rose of Lima*, which is short and shocking.

Last, but not least, he should become intimately acquainted with a great many priests, especially foreign ones. He should consult them in the confessional upon cases of conscience, knotty points, &c., and see them at the dinner-table over their wine. Let all this be done zealously and uninterruptedly for a period varying from seven to twenty years—few cases progress more rapidly—and your convert if worth anything will not disappoint you. But you must give him time. Rome was not built in a day, and she will not be destroyed in a day. Innumerable occult influences, wholly unsuspected by lookers-on, have frequently influenced during a period of many months those contemplating Rome, and having finally braved public opinion, and taken the decisive step, is it at all likely that they will be laughed out of such convictions by some indignant Protestant, who in all probability has never thought about his *own* creed, and would be much embarrassed to give an answer to the question "How do you know the Protestants are right?" Everybody is aware that a large proportion of converts quietly leave the Church of Rome; some of them return to the sect they quitted, but most of them become free-thinkers.

Only a few months ago I heard a priest, whose success in winning Anglicans to Rome is well-known, give an address to a religious community upon the occasion of his receiving a convert into the church. He said, "the wonderful religious movement throughout the length and breadth of the metropolis, hopeful and encouraging though it seems, fills me with apprehension. It is one thing to receive the faith and another to retain it. Grave doubts beset me when I review my converts, and I therefore earnestly implore you to pray that they may obtain the grace of perseverance."

My circle of acquaintances is by no means extensive, and yet I have seen ten of them abandon the

Church of Rome. Of these ten, seven were converts. The remaining three were an Italian lady, an Italian gentleman, and a young Spaniard. I know them intimately; they are all free-thinkers, though the men were educated in Catholic colleges abroad. Let us now see how Rome looks to thoughtful converts, when, having recovered from the agitation ordinarily inseparable from a step so important, and having become reconciled to the novelty of their position, they can calmly glance around them.

Though it is mainly my *own* experience that I am about to submit to the reader, I am, I believe, justified in constituting myself the mouth-piece of others from whom I am now severed by death or distance, but with whom I have frequently discussed those tenets, practices, and tendencies, which we all ultimately repudiated entirely. The remainder of this pamphlet will be unsatisfactory owing to its fragmentary character. I have endeavoured to recall the various things that shocked and startled me, as one by one they came before me, until the Papal Infallibility proved the drop too much and drove me without the pale. Had I heard Mgr. Berteaud, Bishop of Tulle, preach in Paris three years ago, I should have had a clearer idea of infallibility, for he contends that "St. Peter did not need to be taught by Christ, as he was in confidential relations with the Father independently of the Son, and that the like privilege extends to his successors; thus Father and Pope may have secrets in which Christ does not participate, so that it is safer to go to the Pope than to Christ, for when the Pope speaks it is more than Christ—it is God the Father Himself"! Thus spoke the learned Bishop in the Church of St. Eustache.

From first to last I was astonished, disconcerted, and scandalized at the irreverent rapidity with which priests allow themselves to address God in the solemn sacrifice of the mass. Not one priest, now and then,

but *all* the priests I knew habitually gabbled over their mass with such unseemly haste, that I, though my own utterance is rapid to a fault, soon abandoned all idea of keeping up with them. From the supposed divinity of the reputed author of the Lord's Prayer and from its extreme brevity, one would suppose that something like reverence would accompany its recital, yet that is the very prayer the priests gabble through in a manner I found to be physically impossible, and which led me to surmise that labial as well as "mental reservations" were sanctioned by Rome.

Nothing can exceed the ludicrous manner in which the Rosary and Angelus are scrambled through in public; it must be heard to be believed—priests and people are animated apparently by but one object, to get it over as fast as possible. Let any one go into a Catholic church while this devotion is going on and say whether or no I exaggerate. Father Faber thought it "advisable to pray at railroad speed, that the prayer might be over before the devil had time to tamper with it"! I have asked priests how it is that they encourage such perfunctory devotion by setting so bad an example. I have been told "God looks to the heart, and as our thoughts always travel much quicker than our words, it cannot matter how fast we move our lips." Rome is never at a loss for an answer! Other priests have, however, agreed with me and admitted that it would be far better to have ten "Hail Marys" said with devotion, than fifty so ludicrously gabbled. The Stations of the Cross generally performed in all the churches upon Friday evenings in Lent, ought from its nature to be one of the most impressive devotions; but let those anxious to pay their tribute of sorrow and sympathy to their suffering Master avoid those fourteen stations where all their devotions will be put to flight by the fourteen "Our Fathers," "Hail Marys," and "Glory be to the Fathers," hurried through with the same busi-



ness-like rapidity which mars the mass, the Rosary, and indeed all the vocal prayers at which I have had the misfortune to be present.

Another great stumbling-block to converts, is the filth of the sanctified. The unpretending secular priest says *his* mass with clean hands; but those conspicuous for piety, like the Capuchin Fathers and Monks of Mount Carmel, say *their* mass with very dirty hands and black nails. They go through the ceremony of dipping the tips of their fingers into cold water at what is ironically called the "Lavabo," but hot water, soap, flannel, and a nail-brush would be a more appropriate Lavabo for one about to handle his Creator. "In the hands of the priest," says S. Augustine, "as in the virginal womb of Mary, the word becomes incarnate." "In the hands of the priest," says Bossuet, "a *physical* action takes place as real as that by which the Saviour's body was formed the first time." But very holy priests do not think it at all necessary to have clean hands; a clean *heart* is all they crave, and in the Church of Rome outward and visible filth is not unfrequently viewed as a symptom of inward and spiritual grace; but it takes converts a long time to associate a lively faith in the Real Presence with very dirty fingers, and many ardent Catholics, to whom I have often mentioned my own notions on this point, have honestly admitted that the negligence of very holy priests in this particular has impressed them very unfavourably; the only excuse that can be made for them is, that they are "righteous over much."

Those who leave the Church of England on account of the discord which there prevails, are wofully disappointed as they gradually discover that in joining the Church of Rome they have not come to an "innumerable company of angels."

Bitterness of feeling which, strange to say, the priests take no pains to conceal, is found among Catholic orders as among Protestant sects. The

secular priests are jealous of the regulars, who manage to get hold of more consciences, and, consequently, of more money.

An excellent secular priest once said to me, "When I get tired of real hard work I shall go into a monastery; those monks have a fine time of it; never exposed to the inclemency of the weather, and always taken care of when they are ill. I have no one to look after *me*. Whoever wants an easy life, let him be a monk, say I, and whoever wants to get rich, let him take a vow of poverty!" An excellent regular priest once said to me, "What should a secular priest know of the inner life? Always in contact with the 'world,' what should *he* know of union with God, and how can *he* guide a soul through the obscure night of mental prayer? I have never been able to comprehend the vocation of a secular priest." Another emphatically expressed his doubts as to whether Monsignor Capel would be saved; and, considering that several monsignors have "come out from among them," those doubts were justifiable! Let those who wish to convince themselves of the malevolence existing between the regulars and the seculars, take up their quarters in Kensington and make their observations.

"How is it you do not come to hear me preach on Tuesdays?" said a Kensington priest to me. "We attend the Carmelite church," said I, "and prefer it to any other." "I am quite at a loss to understand what in the world people find so attractive in that church, and in those uneducated foreign monks," observed he; "what is the *use* of them? what do they *do* all day?" The monks are not allowed to administer the last sacraments without the permission of the head-priest at the Pro-Cathedral, who refuses to grant it. Once this refusal went forth under circumstances that placed his conduct in a very unamiable light. An elderly French gentlewoman came over during

the war, and fell ill in her rooms, just opposite the Carmelite church. The French monks visited her frequently, and showed her every attention; but, as her end approached, it was explained to her that she would be obliged to send for an Englishman from the Pro-Cathedral. She besought the monk to ask permission to attend her until the end; but he, having been frequently refused, declined. A friend of mine, who had devoted much time and money to the interests of the Pro-Cathedral priests, offered to present the old lady's petition in person and plead her cause herself. She was unsuccessful. The French monk was not allowed to give the last sacraments to his countrywoman who was dying just opposite to him, so she was anointed by an Englishman from the parish church. Not converts only, but old Catholics, are shocked at the envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness so artlessly exhibited by their spiritual pastors and masters. The priests I knew had a very contemptuous opinion of the Jesuits and their tactics; they used their private judgment considerably while discussing their demerits, and were of opinion that the members of the Society of Jesus were more alive to their *own* interest than to that of their Master!

However, it takes converts a long while to digest the various inconsistencies and disappointments that come before them. None so blind as those who will not see. Converts are in that position; they see things as they *ought* to be—not as they are. But give them time, lend yourself to their delusions, go with them to church now and then, read the same books, second the setting-up of a candle before an image of St. Joseph, treat their favourite priests hospitably, and you will have your reward.

In my visits to the sick I was occasionally asked for an Agnus Dei. I had never seen one. I went to buy some and found they were not to be purchased, but that I might possibly get one from a priest. I men-

tioned the matter to an amiable old lady, who at once gave me what she called a "very perfect" one, which some devout priest had brought from Rome. It was enclosed in a tiny leather bag, neatly stitched with silk.

Previous to giving it away, I thought I would have a look at it, so I ripped it open and saw some cotton-wool. Wool was more suggestive of a lamb, but they had told me there was *wax* in the bag, and, as this was a "very perfect" Agnus Dei, I expected to find *wax*. I saw the wool but not the wax; however, a priest had told me not to trust the evidence of my senses, so I replaced the wool, stitched up the bag and gave it away; for after all a fraction of wax *might* have been there to which the Papal blessing *might* have been attached, and which *might* prove invaluable in a thunder-storm. In religion we must walk by faith and not by sight. It was not more extraordinary that an atom of wax, invisible to the naked eye, should preserve from lightning than that a crumb of the host should contain the entire Christ! Some time afterwards, a priest for whom I have a sincere regard, asked me to do him a great favour. He wanted me to translate a little book upon the Agnus Dei from the French. I did so, and much regret that I kept no extracts from a work to which I owe many a hearty laugh. An Agnus Dei was there said to be well-nigh omnipotent, curing every species of malady, and averting all peril on land and water. With an Agnus Dei worn with faith, all human interference was rendered unnecessary, and even a tiny fraction of one (for an entire one is rarely seen) had produced results most marvellous. In justice to the priest I must add that he was heartily ashamed of that little book, and called to express his regret that I had wasted my time over it. Half of it had been cut out by the authorities to whom he submitted it, while he said *he* should have cut out the whole of it!

Everybody is aware that nothing is so hostile to the interests of Rome as private judgment, and that to the suppression of it she owes that appearance of unity so attractive to converts. But let the converts dive deeply and they will come to such a rich vein of confusion among the priests, to whose judgment they are so ready to submit, that at last they will be forced to lay aside their ecclesiastical spectacles and scrutinise this confusion with the naked eye. Fervent converts of either sex are generally willing enough to give up their private judgment, at least for a while.

Many of them have long been tossed about upon the waves of controversy, and, having been driven from pillar to post, "seeking rest and finding none," are quite delighted to lie at anchor in the hospitable harbour of the Church of Rome; but the moment they put to sea again, as the enterprising are sure to do, they will find a *most* uneven surface, and upon the rocks beneath the greater number will certainly shipwreck. Once while waiting to see a friend, I saw a book upon "Frequent Communion," by the Abbé Favre. It interested me and I borrowed it. In it were these words: "If you permit the sacred host to dissolve in the mouth you do not communicate, because the Eucharist does not nourish or produce its effects but in the manner of food by descending into the chest." Wondering what, under such highly problematical circumstances became of Jesus Christ, I was much struck by these lines and determined to ventilate the matter. I read the extract to a lady of almost masculine intellect, who, though she had been brought up a Catholic, has recently left the Church. She said she always endeavoured to keep her tongue motionless after communion, and was never conscious of the act of deglutition. "Then," said I, "it is quite clear that you have never communicated."

When next I went to confession I asked the priest

if these things were so. "I never heard of such a thing in my life," said he, with genuine amazement; but when I gave my authority, and showed him the extract, he said he would make inquiry. Meantime, my mother, who was as deeply interested in these matters as myself, determined to ask her learned Jesuit confessor the same question. On the following Saturday we each went to confession, and then compared notes. My secular priest said, "I have made inquiries about that matter and find it is true; you do *not* communicate; you must not let the Host lose its consistency, but swallow it entire." My mother's Jesuit confessor said, "That's all bosh, my dear child!" No doubt he was right. No doubt that answer would suit most of the questions asked in the confessional, and put an effectual end to all scruples of conscience; but what about the convert who is so ready to give up his *own* judgment and submit to another?

People cannot run over to the Vatican for an infallible answer. One priest says that they have *not* received Jesus Christ, another says they *have*, and who is to decide?

Before becoming a Catholic I had mesmerised many people and performed various cures. My first confessor was a Jesuit, who, being less ignorant of mesmerism and its effects than are priests generally, raised no objection to my continuing to employ it as a curative agent. But he went abroad, and I sought another priest, who not only seemed horrified that I had ever had anything to do with mesmerism, but insisted upon my giving it up. I maintained that, as a Jesuit father had sanctioned it, it was impossible the Church could condemn it. My words made an impression. He promised to make particular inquiry concerning the decision of the Church on the subject. He did so, and assured me that under no circumstances could a practice of a nature so questionable

be tolerated, and he once more requested me to abandon it.

Some months later, an Italian priest of gentle birth and considerable culture, came to pass his vacation in London. He was introduced to us, and became our constant visitor. He was slowly regaining his strength after a lingering attack of typhoid fever, and one day asked me if I could direct him to a respectable *mesmerist*, as he had but little faith in drugs! Laughing in my sleeve, I sent him to Mons. Adolphe Didier, who mesmerised him three times a week until he returned to Italy considerably benefited. This most amiable and charitable priest assured me that the English clergy dawdle sadly over mass, and that in Italy they get over it in twenty minutes. On Sunday he chose the ten o'clock mass because it was the shortest, but invariably complained, with amusing frankness, of its *length*. He did not give us an opportunity of seeing how fast *he* could celebrate the solemn sacrifice, for he did not say mass at all during his holidays, but, availing himself of his opportunity, entered freely into the amusements of the metropolis, frequenting, in particular, the Canterbury Hall, where, having paid for two seats, one for himself and the other for his hat, he gave himself up to the enjoyment of the comic songs he heard, the music and words of one of which he took to Italy to console himself with when his holidays were over. I was subsequently thrown into frequent contact with some monks from La Trappe, temporarily absent from their monastery for mercantile purposes, whose conduct, though they received Jesus Christ every day, and never went to the Canterbury Hall, contrasted most unfavourably with that of our Italian friend. I had an opportunity of observing those monks as, day after day, they breakfasted upon rump-steak, eggs, claret, and coffee. I heard the incessant chattering the priest kept up, and examined the unusually deli-

cate texture of his flannel vests. His temper was under as little control as his tongue, and his conduct, from first to last, exhibited a lamentable absence of honourable feeling. It does not fall to the lot of many to walk through the streets of London with a Trappist monk to buy a frying-pan. The priest's companion was the cook of the community, and an adept at frying. Wishing to put his talent to the test, I requested him to fry some fish, &c. Having obtained the priest's permission, he of course assented, but contended that he must have a different frying-pan. He could not speak English, and I could not understand what sort of a frying-pan he wanted, so I offered to go with him to a shop to buy one. The priest raised no objection, and promising not to speak unnecessarily, we sallied forth. My impression *now* is that the objection to the frying-pan was a *ruse* on the part of the cook, for he could not meet with one to suit him; but, as we were returning, he suddenly showed me some paper money, and asked me where he could get it changed. I took him to a shop, and saw some sovereigns handed over to him. "I do not wish Father Francis to know anything about this," said he. "All right," said I, "the silence of La Trappe shall seal my lips!" I should never have believed that a Trappist priest would have allowed his young monk to take a walk with a woman—but he did. I should never have believed that a young monk, so fresh from his vows, would have had any money unknown to his superior—but he had. Still less should I have believed that he would take me into his confidence, and get that money changed through my instrumentality—but he did. We knew for a certainty that those monks were from La Trappe—we should never have guessed it. The monk was as effectually hidden in the *mar* as was the Agnus Dei in that cotton wool! Their affections may have been set upon "things above,"



but their conversation was decidedly "of the earth-earthly," and my ecclesiastical spectacles almost fell off during my acquaintance with them. Father Francis contradicted the report that Trappists dig their own graves. He said the mortality was very high in the Order, and, judging by appearances, was in no hurry to rejoin his brethren who "die daily!"

Experiences such as mine were calculated to set a convert thinking, and I did think very deeply—but the end was not yet—I had not dug deeply enough.

The next thing that arrested my attention was spirit-rapping. Those priests *I* knew viewed it as an appalling sin. They assured me that it emanated from the devil, and that the sign of the cross had frequently put an abrupt termination to a *séance* at which great things were expected. I did not contradict them. The priests my mother knew took a more genial view of the matter, and volunteered to accompany her to a *séance*, so she wrote to a well-known medium and appointed a meeting. Some of them also were under the erroneous impression that in their sacred presence no manifestations could take place, and that a crucifix, breviary, or sign of the cross could put a legion of devils to flight, but *we knew better*, and it is well that all priests should know that some of the most startling phenomena take place in defiance of so-called holy people and holy objects. It is in the presence of confirmed sceptics and materialists that no results ensue; a fact so well known that should a priest succeed by his mere presence in preventing or interrupting any so-called manifestations, one would be inclined to suspect that the failure was due to infidelity on *his* part, or that the supposed fraction of the true Cross in his crucifix was not genuine!

An amusing instance of the folly of leaning upon a so-called "superior" occurred in my own experience. My confessor was abroad. I was passing

through a mental phase of an embarrassing nature, so, like a well-instructed Catholic, I determined to "show myself to the priest." Selecting one who knew me well, I manifested myself unto him. He admitted his inability to counsel me, but earnestly recommended me to apply to the bishop of the diocese, Dr. Grant, who from his position as father of the flock, and from his distinguished piety, was so competent to give me good advice. I obeyed this well-meaning but short-sighted priest, sought Dr. Grant, and followed the whimsical counsel he gave.

How matters might have turned out had I used my own judgment it is, of course, impossible to say; but worse they could not have gone than they did under the episcopal guidance of that holy man.

A third, to whom long after I mentioned the matter, expressed his amazement that any priest should have sent me to a man so devoid of judgment as Dr. Grant, while a fourth insinuated that he was more of a sneak than a saint. Who shall decide when doctors disagree?

Infallibility ought to be transferable; the fallibility of the poor priests causes sad havoc among the faithful, who trust implicitly to the leadership of those who to them are Popes, and to whom they are taught to look up to as to God; for "the voice of the priest is the voice of God," and each man's confessor is to him a bright and shining light.

By this time I had had almost enough of "spiritual direction," and whenever my thoughts reverted to the matter, one Martin of blessed memory obtruded himself into my meditations and detracted seriously from the dignity of the whole subject. I was only a convert!

Before and after my reception into the church I had spoken often and openly with my Jesuit instructor upon the subject of Mary.

Father, Son, and Holy Ghost were, I contended, enough for any reasonable person, and Mary was an

excrement. I told him I considered the Rosary a most contemptible devotion, and that to hear how agreeable such a string of "Hail Marys" was to Christ's mother, did not raise her in my estimation. I told him I could neither use the prayers nor believe the miracles in the "Glories of Mary," and that I was glad that many staunch, old Catholics regretted the circulation of such a collection of absurdities. Jesuits, it is well known, are "all things to all men;" their main object is to send people away pleased with themselves and, above all, with their director; my friend was one of the most acute but not one of the most conciliating. He said there was no necessity for me to use prayers or adopt practices towards which I felt no attraction. The Rosary was not of obligation—belief in the miracles was not binding upon the faithful. The Litany of our Lady was certainly sung at Benediction, but Benediction was not of obligation, so that I was making a great fuss about nothing. St. Alphonsus was an enthusiastic Neapolitan, and of course his fervent appeals to Mary sounded like exaggerations when translated into English and read by those who had not his love for Mary—a lover would be excused, even commended, for saying he adored his intended, and no one would suspect him of idolatry. I was not to depreciate the "Glories of Mary;" I was to admit that I did not love Mary, and that St. Liguori did; he hoped the day would come when I should think differently, &c. He said, that as on earth we had father and mother, so in heaven the feminine element was not wanting, and that Mary was our heavenly mother.

I remarked that, as the Holy Ghost was feminine, Mary was not wanted on account of her sex. I was studying Hebrew with a Jew, who took an early opportunity of telling me that in Hebrew that person of the Christian Trinity is feminine, as well as the bird Jonah, the dove, by which that person is sym-

bolised. He then, to *humble* me, assured me that one "Hail Mary" offered with childlike faith is more pleasing to God than learned disquisitions; that I had better pray for simplicity and study the penny catechism; that he knew a poor milk-woman who, though she had no education, had more "inward light" than many who thought themselves to be somewhat, &c. With similar platitudes confessors are in the habit of silencing their troublesome penitents. I told a friend of mine—not a convert—about that poor milk-woman. To my surprise she burst out laughing. "Why," said she, "*my* confessor has a pious milk-woman in tow! I bought 'Watts's Logic' the other day, and was silly enough to tell him how much I liked it. He said I must never look into it again, that humility and not philosophy was expected of me, and that he knew a poor milk-woman who had more knowledge of God's ways than his most learned penitents." We agreed that milk-women should have their confessionals where babes in theology might imbibe the pure milk of the Word until able to digest 'Watts's Logic' and the Holy Ghost. The function of the Holy Ghost is not easy to understand, for though Mary was his spouse, Christ was not his son. Christ was the Son of God the *Father* who was *not* the Spouse of Mary. The Holy Ghost, we are told, united God the Father to His daughter Mary, and the Incarnation was the result! I could not understand this "mystery," but I was not a milk-woman!

However, Mary herself seemed less complicated than her relations, and, anxious to do as others did, and to lose no grace through my own negligence, I commenced invoking her.

I soon became conscious that the attitude of my mind seemed precisely the same whether I was addressing God, Mary, or Joseph, and that therefore there must be something wrong in myself or the system. I returned to the charge with the Jesuit. He admitted

the difficulty, but said that "folks *did* manage to overcome it, that in religion everything depended upon the *will*. We must make our intention before we begin to pray. Old Catholics felt the distinction between *dulia* and *latria*, and so should I, *by-and-by*." I read a work upon the subject, and found that the Saints do not hear the prayers made to them. God hears them and tells them that certain people are praying; *then* the Saints begin to pray and God begins to listen, so that, after all, it is really to God that people are praying! The method was too complicated for me, though I was considered lamentably deficient in simplicity. Rome specially recommends the practice of meditation, and I *did* meditate at considerable length. Would that others would devote themselves to so wholesome a practice. I have said I went among the poor. To *them* I feel sure Mary is Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. I have spoken to priests who have travelled in Italy and in Ireland; they have assured me that the lower orders in both countries are far more devout to the Saints than the upper classes here are to the Trinity. I visited a Catholic servant girl who was in St. Mary's Hospital, about to undergo a dangerous operation. I did not know at that time that the Mother was more loved than the Son, so began speaking to her about Jesus. "I put all my trust in Mary," said she; "I get all I want from Mary; I shall squeeze my image of Mary tight in my hand all through the operation; I am sure she will bring me through." When naming this to a priest who was dining with us, he assured me that he had recently been attending a dying Irishwoman, and could not induce her to say the holy name. There is an indulgence for saying "Jesus" at the time of death, but she would say nothing but Mary! An ardent and most charitable Roman Catholic friend once called upon me and implored me to pray for a poor woman who was dying in the workhouse. She

had been a fervent Catholic, and particularly devout to St. Joseph, but now, said my friend, "she talks about 'Jesus *only*' and all that *Protestant cant*, so I have taken her a picture of St. Joseph, but I am most anxious about her, for she has actually refused to see a priest, and it is very shocking."

This woman interested me deeply. I was anxious to see her and ask why she had cast off Joseph and the priest just when others seem most in need of them; so I hastened to the workhouse, but was too late. The woman had expired, "trusting to Jesus" to the last, and seeking no additional aid from Joseph or the priest. My friend was much grieved, but I was far more concerned upon *her* account, and sympathised more with the poor woman who had transferred her affections from Joseph to Jesus. I have been thrown into contact with a great number of Catholics who had the liveliest faith in Joseph, and who were constantly making "Novenas" to him, burning a lamp in his honour, and setting a candle up in the church before his statue. Without one exception, I can say that signal failure was the result of all these petitions and practices—failure in one instance so complete that I can never recall it without a smile. Joseph is not an impartial saint; he has his favourites. S. Teresa was one; perhaps the poor woman in the workhouse was *not* one.

I have already commented upon the marvellous rapidity with which priests run up the hill of Calvary to crucify Christ afresh in the unbloody sacrifice of the mass, but I had yet to learn in what extraordinary places they sometimes keep their Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

An intelligent young lady, a friend of mine, went to America as a governess. When out of a situation she was engaged by a priest for a few months as house-keeper. She was only twenty-four. One evening, while she was quietly mending his cope, he

entered the room and opened a cupboard, in which, among other articles, his boots and shoes were kept. "Your thickest boots are not there," said my friend. "I do not want them," said he; "I have only come for the blessed sacrament. I am going to a sick call, and shall not be in till late." My young friend had no idea Jesus Christ was in the boot-cupboard, but there he was. She was not fortunate in her ecclesiastical acquaintances; she had encountered some in Austria whose mode of life afforded her copious matter for meditation, and now she was not less amazed to be engaged as housekeeper to a priest who said office in true American fashion with his feet on the hobs and kept the blessed sacrament in his boot-cupboard. When her letter arrived containing this singular information, we had with us an Irish lady, a very dear friend. I read the letter to her. She said, "If you were to see the Irish priests and the places in which *they* keep the blessed sacrament, you would wonder the people have a morsel of faith left. What would you think of a priest who kept it in his waistcoat-pocket during a sailing excursion, and put it in the drawer with his fishing-tackle when he got home? Ah, you English have no idea of the faith of the Irish! *you* could never hold out!" "But," said I, "do you think the *priests* have as much faith as the people?" "Well, then," said she (she was a merry girl from Sligo), "what they have faith in is a glass of good whisky and a chat upon politics; my brother-in-law could never get them out of his house as long as a drop of whisky was left in the bottle! There is no merit, *at all at all*, in the faith of you English; you should see an Irish missionary over boiled leg of mutton, whisky and politics, and then put your faith to the proof by going to confession to him the next morning, while two or three dogs are quarrelling close to the confessional. You do not know what faith is, in England!"

*She*, doubtless, knew what superstition was in Ireland, and may have had frequent opportunities of remarking with what unedifying freedom some of the Irish priests permit themselves to discuss confessional matters over their dessert.

Various things had sorely shocked me, as one by one they presented themselves to my reluctant gaze ; but to hear priests express themselves so unreservedly upon confessional matters, and that in the presence of the laity, was certainly not calculated to impress a convert favourably. "Priests," said an old Irish priest to me across the dessert-table "are as embarrassed as possible when they come to confession, and no wonder, as the burden of their song is generally something against the holy virtue. We are often much embarrassed to know how to act ; for instance, here is a man and here is a woman, both in the same boat, both come to confession, but neither of them likely to bid adieu to the other. I withhold absolution, but am told 'the whole family means to communicate the following morning, and great scandal will be caused by my abstaining, for they know I have come out to confession ; pray do give me absolution !' What is the poor priest to do ? He cannot throw Jesus Christ's Body to the dogs ; he *may* not, even if he would, expose his penitent to remark ; I will tell you how to manage. I give no absolution ; I tell the penitent to come to church with the others, but to remember at the last moment that she swallowed a drop of water and is disqualified for communion, having broken her fast. Thus I screen Jesus Christ." Meditating upon these things, it seemed to me that, if, to a woman and a convert, a priest will permit himself to chat in this strain after four glasses of sherry, what would he not say to his brethren after a glass or two of whisky ? *Names*, I have been told, they are careful to conceal, but reticent about the confes-



sional many of them are not, and those who *are* are called "priggish" by the rest. A glass of wine elicits many a remark respecting the tedious, troublesome, and expensive ceremonial of which not the priests only, but many of the thoughtful laity are not merely weary but ashamed. It is a pitiable sight—one a convert ought to see—the preliminaries of a procession which take place in a dirty sacristy; at the Italian Church, for instance, let a convert go thither and meditate.

An experience of a different nature came before me next. I was requested to prepare a row of middle-class girls for their first Communion, and to bestow special care upon one, named Emma, who it seems had been already instructed for that sacrament a year previously, but had not presented herself at the altar, saying she had overslept herself. I did my best with them all, and chose the easiest hymn I could find for them all to learn. It began "Jesus, Jesus come to me, Oh how much I long for Thee." But Emma never knew it. One day she had lost her book; another day she had had no time; then she had been ill; had been sent out on errands; had known it quite well last night, but now it had all gone out of her head. I retained her when the others left, and asked her kindly how it was she would not commit such an easy hymn to memory. "It is not *that*," said Emma, "but I *don't* long for Him, and I will not say I long for Him when I know I do not." "But do you not love Jesus?" said I. "No, not much; I like many people much better," said candid Emma. "But we must try to love Him and to long for Him . . ." She interrupted me with "Oh, I know all that, but suppose I *don't* love Him, what then?" This was a poser, so I said I would think over the matter. These children were in a convent school, where they were very short of nuns, two being ill, so I was asked to help them. The reverend mother evinced no

horror at Emma's state of mind, but said, "It does look so bad for a convent girl nearly fifteen not to have made her first Communion; what will people say? You had better choose another hymn; go on preparing her and if the priest passes her, *you* will have no responsibility."

I changed the hymn and "went on" preparing her; but at the eleventh hour Emma "went off," and was never seen by those conscientious nuns again. I have every reason to suspect that from first to last the chief object of the Church is, like that of "the world," to keep up appearances.

The confessional is from first to last a mass of inconsistencies, contradictions, and absurdities, but it requires some time to detect them. Those who go but rarely to what is called "their duty," and who are indifferent about religious matters, will find nothing to cavil at in the confessional. But the earnest, thoughtful Catholic, who rakes out his conscience every week, and studies the conduct of those who do likewise, may find a few flaws in the confessional—a few serious drawbacks to it, which may lead him, though reluctantly, to the conclusion that he could *do* his duty quite as well without *going* to "his duty." Converts fancy it will be such an assistance to them to have a spiritual guide who will take a lively interest in them, pilot them through all difficulties, and watch over them with tender solicitude. It takes them some time to find out that the most unsatisfactory of all counsellors are the timid, tongue-tied, servile clergy of the tyrannical Church of Rome. Exemplary Catholics, whom I have long known, have frequently cautioned me against following priests' advice in secular matters—against taking a servant or governess upon their recommendation, and against telling them one whit more than is absolutely necessary about anything. But my mother and myself had to find out for ourselves how futile it is to expect the

smallest help from them even upon matters spiritual. Reciprocity in the confessional there cannot be, the priest is tongue-tied, he dares not say what he thinks, he must pretend to be either surprised, grieved, disappointed, or quite prepared to find that his penitent has any doubts, misgivings, or difficulties, about any article of faith. Not one of them ever threw the least light upon anything I ever put before them. They invariably wriggle out of everything, by saying "treat all thoughts which assail you upon such matters as *temptations*, and whenever you are inclined to doubt about any doctrine, make an act of faith." Once three hosts were put into my mouth, possibly they had been kept in a damp place; they separated in my mouth, and confusion arose in my mind about these three wafers which, if given to three communicants, would have been three Christs. I told a priest that as in a crumb of the host there is supposed to be an entire man, I could not help imagining that in three hosts there must be three Christs. "Temptations, my child, temptations; he that receives a crumb receives his Saviour; he that receives three hosts receives his Saviour; temptations, my child!" I soon left off imparting my difficulties to them; they had but one answer, "Temptations!"

Of course the priest dares not speak out boldly, and say "the whole affair is such a tissue of absurdities and contradictions that if I were to permit myself to dive deeply into it I should never say mass again."

By telling the penitent that she is labouring under a temptation they get rid of the difficulty, push the matter on to the devil's back, and tranquillise the penitent, who is rather proud that she is allowed to be tempted, "counting it all joy," and delighted to find that what she really thought was a want of faith is only a temptation. The strength and the weakness of Rome lies in the Confessional. Of late the Church has urged very frequent confession upon her children.

Elderly Catholics assure me that in their young days it was considered sufficient to confess before great festivals only; and they regret the frequency of confession, "which takes young people and servants away from home duties and fills their heads with spiritual direction, until they all fancy they are called to the cloister." Certain it is that frequent confession is inculcated, and for many years I was rarely absent more than a week from confession. I had a great variety of Confessors, not from love of change, but from force of circumstances. I made my first confession to a Jesuit; it was, of course, a general confession, embracing all my previous life. He told me that I should never have to revert to anything I had said; that after he had given me Absolution the past would be entirely blotted out, and that I was to begin my career as a true child of the Church. Six weeks later he heard my mother's first confession, and made similar remarks to her. This Jesuit was, upon the whole, the best of my various Confessors; for though he had his surly moods, when he would send me to the penny catechism, he was generally willing to discuss a point with me as with an equal. Priests love to dogmatise and to lay down the law, but this old priest did neither, and I respected him. He considered that an immense amount of time was wasted in Farm Street by both priest and penitent in so-called "direction." Let anyone go to Farm Street on a Wednesday or Saturday afternoon and he will see numbers of the fair sex patiently waiting for an hour or more outside Father Clare's Confessional. Those ladies have nothing to do; they like a great fuss to be made about themselves and their souls; when they find a conciliating priest they make the most of him, and frequently entertain for him an affection so strong as to leave but little room in their hearts for any other love. This may easily be the case, without any of that undue familiarity so often unjustly im-

puted to priests. Young gentlewomen would not be attracted by such conduct; but, nevertheless, the feeling entertained for the Confessor is not unfrequently strong enough to deter from matrimony, and I have heard it adduced as a reason for the celibacy among Catholic gentlewomen living in the world. From what I have heard and noticed among my High Church friends, I should surmise that their interviews with *their* spiritual guides are of a far more emotional and sensational character than similar meetings among Roman Catholics. During the two years I continued with the worthy old Jesuit, matters went pretty smoothly; but even *then* confusion had arisen in my mind respecting matter for Absolution, and the expediency of such very frequent confession.

The confession of *venial* sins is not of obligation. I rarely committed a venial sin with full deliberation, for I was straining every nerve to keep my conscience clear, so that no voluntary omission or commission should mar the full effect of my frequent communions. Sins of my past life I had been told *not* to bring forward; moreover, I had read that we are not called upon to satisfy twice for the same sins.

Absolution is called "the dripping of the Precious Blood upon the head of the repentant sinner." But in my weekly confessions there were no intentional faults to own, and, consequently, no contrition could be excited; what, then, became of the Precious Blood? Once I asked my old Jesuit if there was not a great deal of Blood wasted in my case; for venial sin as to *guilt* could be cancelled by contrition, and as to *punishment* by Holy Water, Mass, Communion, &c., without any confession at all. He quoted David's words, "Wash me yet *more* and *more*," one washing is not enough for *me*. Then he added "the Sacrament of Penance has a preventive effect and gives great grace, great power to resist temptation, &c." I retained my own opinion but followed his advice; kept going to con-

fession though I had nothing to confess, and always received Absolution though there was no matter for the Sacrament; it was, I thought, *his* affair—my duty was to obey—but I meditated.

At the end of two years I went abroad. I was taking off my dress preparatory to going to bed; my German hostess and another lady were present. "Good God," said the former to the latter, "she has no Scapular!" Startled at the solemnity of the exclamation, and surprised that my English friends had been so supine as to my eternal welfare, I expressed my readiness to have one. They gave me five bits of flimsy merino, stitched together, and told me that I was to wear them with devotion, and never take them off; so I kissed them now and then, not exactly knowing how to exhibit devotion towards such unsuggestive rags, which *they* called by the imposing name of Our Lady's Livery. "You will never go to Hell as long as you wear that," I was told. "But," said I, "if I keep clear of mortal sin I shall not go to Hell, even if I have no Scapular." "You are just like all converts," said my friend. "You have no *simplicity*; you must try to become a little child if you would be a true Catholic."

I continued my weekly confessions of nothing, and the foreign priest used now and then to ask me if I would rather have Absolution, or merely his Benediction; for, said he, "I have many penitents who, in consequence of a lack of matter, are not absolved each time they come to me." I thought it very odd of him to ask me such a question, as *he* ought to know what to do; however, I chose the Benediction, which seemed to answer just as well.

When I returned to England I found that my respected old Confessor had been sent abroad, and from that time my troubles increased. One day I went to a Marist Father, and began as usual, "Since my last confession, &c." "Say the Confiteor," said

he. For four years I had been weekly to confession, but had never said the Confiteor, which, however, in the "Preparation for the Sacrament of Penance" is appointed to be said. I did not know it in English, but could say it in Latin from having heard it so often in Church. I repeated it, and proceeded to tell him that I could recall no voluntary fault since my last confession, that I had been remiss about several duties, &c., &c. "Be ashamed," said he; "humble yourself very much that you have so little light that you cannot discern your sins. You should hear the holy nuns who come with deep compunction to confess what to their clear vision are grievous sins, but which *you* are too blind to see." "Is it my fault that I cannot see my sins?" said I, privately determining never to go to *him* again. "Pray, my poor child, pray very much to know yourself, and think of the saints who confessed every day and were never at a loss for matter."

After a similar confession, my old Jesuit would have said, "Thank God! say three Gloria Patri for your penance, make a good act of contrition for all the sins you have ever committed, and I will give you Absolution." However, as Saint Liguori says there are a great many "Religious" in Hell, it was not surprising that some of the nuns had more to say than I had.

The following week I went for old sake's sake to Farm Street, where, at the Altar of the Sacred Heart, I had been received into the Church. Another name was over my old friend's Confessional, but in I went and down I knelt, saying the appointed words, Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. "Is the door shut?" said the priest, who possibly felt a draught. I rose, and having ascertained that it *was* shut, returned, and commenced the Confiteor, which I had taken pains to learn in English. "Never mind about all that," said the old gentleman, sharply, "we have

no time for that here; what have you done since your last confession?" Disinclined to open *my* door after such an introduction, I made short work of it, and retired to meditate.

We were then staying with a friend until our plans were settled, and I was availing myself of the interval to visit all the churches I had not seen. The following week I chose Sunday for my confession. A grand mass and a fine sermon were expected at St. George's. I thought I would hit several birds with one stone, and apply to a priest there of some renown, for a solution of the Confiteor mystery. It seems I ought not to have chosen Sunday, but I did not know that, having often seen people confessing on that day.

A few workhouse women were waiting outside his box, but with great courtesy they let me go in first. "Bless me, Father, for I have sinned," said I.

"Why did you not come yesterday," said he, and, without giving me time to reply, went on, "Well, now, we have not done much to please our dear Lord since our last confession; we have heard mass without attention or devotion; we have spoken censoriously, uncharitably, impatiently, and snappishly, have we not?" "Yes, Father," said I, with some mental reservation. "Is there anything else?" "No, Father." "Well, then, in future come on Saturday. Say five Our Fathers for the Holy Souls make an act of contrition, and I will give you Absolution."

By this time I had had nearly enough of casual Confessors—regular directors I had wholly abandoned; but all this time I was praying with great perseverance for a good, zealous, sensible Confessor. Before pronouncing Absolution the priest generally gives utterance to sundry platitudes, *called* indeed "a point," but which are for the most part destitute of piquancy. He will draw your attention to some approaching festival, to some popular devotion, or to some flaw in your character which he thinks your



confession has brought to light. On one occasion I was told that self-love was the great barrier to holiness, that I must learn to hate myself with a good, hearty hatred, and that then God would love me. "Do you understand me, my child?" "Yes, Father," said I; "but when I have arrived at hating myself, how shall I manage to love my neighbour *as myself*?" "Not until you have put away all self-love will you have light to see the truths which the saints not only knew but practised; you need humility—pray for it."

Another time, while wondering what I should find to say in confession, it occurred to me that I had said the Pope was a great fool for sending the Golden Rose to Queen Isabella. Here were two faults; moreover, I had given utterance to this forcible expression in the presence of others, and thereby given scandal. Rather glad to have something definite to say, I accused myself of censuring the conduct of my superior, and . . . but before I could proceed the priest, to my amazement, exclaimed, "Why that is the very thing *I* am always doing; I cannot conceive why the archbishop should fix upon *me* to hear a parcel of nuns' confessions; I have to take two omnibuses besides a long walk, and it costs me a shilling a time; but I do not mean to go again, I can tell him!" I did not finish my confession, but had a cosy chat with this honest fellow, and was sorry to hear he was not resident in England. He seemed to have settled down into a state of chronic indignation, with which I thoroughly sympathised.

About this time I went to call upon a friend who had recently joined the Church. She looked very red and hot. The fender was full of the remains of burnt paper, and there was an oppressive smell of scorched leather in the room. Her Irish Confessor, hearing that she continued using her Protestant Bible, commanded her to burn it, with all other Protestant religious books, and I was just in time to see the remains of her

heretical library smouldering in the fire-place. As I always used, and infinitely preferred, the Protestant version of the Bible, that scene made an impression. Subsequently, when settled with a regular Confessor, I asked him whether there was any objection to my reading the Protestant translation. "Certainly not," was his answer, "you may use any translation you like; the Protestant one is more flowing." However, I was to have a few more experiences before I met with a suitable Confessor, and, meantime, I turned my attention towards some new clothes, and engaged a surgeon's daughter, who had seen better days, to come and work for me. She was much interested in religious matters.

"It is a great blessing," said she, "that priests differ so much; it seems very odd that they *do* differ, if Almighty God really is behind the scenes; but it is a great comfort, for if they all agreed I, for one, should never get Absolution. The other day my Confessor chalked out a course of action I thought would injure my interests, so I would not obey him, and he refused Absolution. I was very anxious to go to Communion the next day, so I took a long walk in the rain, and told my old Confessor all about it. He gave me Absolution at once, and said I was a great fool for submitting any secular matter to a priest." A still more flagrant case came under my notice.

When Cardinal Manning's letter appeared in the papers pronouncing it sacrilege to receive the Sacraments without firmly believing the dogmas of the Infallibility and Immaculate Conception, my mother showed symptoms of rebellion, but went dutifully to her Carmelite Confessor, and told him candidly that she could not assent to the Infallibility. "Then, my child," said he, "I cannot give you Absolution; I am not permitted to do so." "But, surely," said she, "you would not have me say I believe what I do not believe?"

"On the contrary, I admire your frankness, but am obliged to refuse you Absolution," said he.

Perplexed and uneasy, my mother then said she would *try* to digest the unwelcome dogma, upon which the Carmelite relented, and after an unusually long exhortation gave her Absolution. But *such* an Absolution by no means satisfied my mother. She determined to submit the case to a Jesuit at Farm Street, under whose spiritual direction she had long been, though during our stay in Kensington she frequented the Carmelites for convenience sake.

"I have not come to confession," said she. "I cannot get Absolution because I do not believe in Papal Infallibility." "Oh, my dear child," said the genial Jesuit, "you and I perfectly understand each other. Infallibility, you know, only regards faith and morals; make your confession with a quiet mind, and I will give you Absolution directly." My mother, however, insisted that she was not entitled to it, and went away strengthened in her opposition to the arbitrary dogma of Infallibility, and convinced more than ever of the futility, and, in *her* case, of the decidedly injurious effects of frequent confession.

The Carmelite was no doubt right—that is to say, he *began* well; but he ought to have remained firm, and instead of giving Absolution he should have told my mother to go away, and be damned. "Let him be anathema," says the Church; "I will give you Absolution directly," says the Jesuit. And where was the Holy Ghost all this time? with the Cardinal, the Carmelite, or the Jesuit? Perhaps He was on a visit to those heavenly-minded milk-women who had "more knowledge of God's ways than those who thought themselves to be somewhat."

About this time we were intimate with an excellent foreign priest, who frequently passed a few hours with us for the purpose of perfecting himself in

English. *He* was quite opposed to weekly confession in the case of those who led a life of such cloistral monotony as did we. He thought, and we fully agreed with him, that the affair was likely to become merely mechanical, and was injudicious, to say the least of it. Some weeks passed before I felt inclined to confess again. I did not retrograde; I did not lose my fervour; I did not miss the sacrament in the least. I was surrounded by those who never let a week go by without a visit to the priest. They were not edifying specimens of the fruits of the system. Catholic parents have expressed their amazement to me that Protestants, without one half the "means of grace" enjoyed by Catholics, behave so much better. Far be it from me to say that frequent confession *never* does good. I can only say that I was continually distressed to see how extremely remiss about their most obvious duties were those whose concern for their spiritual welfare led them to distant Confessors, and whose examination of conscience occupied a great portion of their time every week. Priests are, I have reason to suspect, very indifferent as to what the penitent does or leaves undone. The great point with them is that you should put in an appearance regularly at Mass, show at Benediction, and be seen before the Blessed Sacrament. Unlike their Master, they prefer that your prayers should be in *public*—in *their* Church, and during devotions in which *they* play a prominent part. This *may* proceed from their child-like simplicity. An indifferent penitent, who frequents the public services of the Church, would, I believe, be more favourably viewed by the clergy than even a saintly milk-woman who confined her devotions to the cow-house.

This manifest absence of the practical element among those always talking of Father This and Father That, this lamentable lack of personal piety among those always handling holy things, feeding upon

Christ and being washed in his blood, drove a zealous friend of mine out of the Church. "I am sadly afraid," wrote she, "that even well-meaning Catholics prefer religion to morality. The Church seems everything; it does me no good, and I have left it for ever."

At length I went to confession once more, after six weeks' absence. "Name a sin of your past life," said the Redemptorist, "*that* I may give you Absolution." Here was something quite new. I had been told never to revert to past sins; I had been absolved hundreds of times without adding a sin of my past life, though, as the reader knows, I had wondered what the Precious Blood fell upon, and what grace could accompany the recital of involuntary venial faults for which I could not feel contrition. Suddenly called upon to name an old sin, I took the first which suggested itself, and said I had stolen a red herring, with full deliberation, when I was twelve years old. I have since ascertained that the value of the thing stolen must be five shillings to constitute a *mortal* sin, so that I was not much nearer the mark with my poor red herring. It was a *venial* sin, and restitution was required under pain of loss of grace for voluntary venial sin; however, I got Absolution, after explaining that I could not trace the owner of the herring.

I tried another Redemptorist, and when he demanded a sin of my past life, said, "I am a convert." "Then name a mortal sin since your conversion," persisted he. "I am unable to see"—I had used that form of expression ever since the Marist had rebuked me for blindness—"any mortal sin since I was received," said I. That scrupulous man heaved a deep sigh, but, begging me to be very sorry indeed for all my sins, absolved me inaudibly.

I had had many misgivings, but now felt quite sure that the Precious Blood could be fully absorbed by *mortal* sin only. However, I had recourse to a priest

said to be a profound theologian. "You must never allow a priest to give you Absolution without sufficient matter," said he; "and if there be no matter, you are always to name a former sin—you may bring forward the same thing every week if you like."

"How can a sin once confessed, forgiven, and atoned for, serve over and over again?" said I. "Is it not very much like doubting the efficacy of the Precious Blood, which washed it effectually away the first time?"

"The Church allows it," said he, "and we may be sure it is all right." He proceeded to tell me that a difference of opinion exists in the Church about Baptism, some theologians accepting and some contesting the validity of heretical baptism. Those priests who were so careful to ask for a sin of my past life were those who believed I had been properly baptised in infancy. Those who gave Absolution without allusion to the past believed that my second baptism in the Roman Catholic Church was alone valid, and that therefore I had only to look back as far as that for my mortal sins. All this having been fully explained to me, the next thing to be done was to find a priest who required neither the Confiteor, which I did not like—though it seems it ought to be said—nor a sin of my past life, for which I could not keep renewing the heart-breaking sorrow implied by contrition. Before succeeding, two or three other matters came under my notice which impressed me very unfavourably, and once more drew my attention towards that blessed Martin, and considerably increased my devotion to him. I went to call upon the old lady who had given me the "very perfect" Agnus Dei, and there I met a lady of Spanish extraction. Hearing that I was a convert she expressed amazement, saying, "Why I, who have always been brought up in the Church, do not believe one half she teaches. For instance, I do not believe one word about Abso-

lution, and my Confessor knows it. I wonder he gives me Absolution! I should not dare to do so if I were a priest." "But why do you go if you have no faith?" asked I. "Well," said she, "it is the force of habit; before communion it is usual to confess. I wish I had more faith. I always tell the priest I do not believe; if he likes to absolve me after that, it is *his* affair." I found that her confessor was the same genial Jesuit who had so indulgently proposed to absolve my doubting mother. The old lady did not like the turn the conversation had taken. She felt how strange it must sound to a convert's ears; so, in the amiable hope of making matters better, she made them worse by interrupting with "I should like to have three masses said for my poor dear niece. I have three said every year, but really five shillings is a great deal to give for a mass. I used to send over to France and get them said for a franc apiece, but the archbishop has put a stop to that, and makes us pay five shillings and have them said in England."

With that absence of simplicity for which I had frequently been reproached, I asked how it was that Christ could be had cheaper on the Continent, and was told that there were more priests there, and that "everything was cheaper," Christ, of course, included. My knowledge of human nature—from which, alas! sacerdotal nature is no departure—inclined me to the opinion that the five-shilling rule was often violated, and, anxious to be of use to the old lady, I sought and found a priest who, for her and for other friends of mine, said mass for half-a-crown. This matter being now settled to everybody's satisfaction, except mine, I determined to talk it over with an intelligent Catholic then devoted to the Church, but now a free-thinker.

He said, "If you think out all these things you will certainly lose your faith; it does not do to dive deeply into every little thing. I have never paid a

priest for saying mass; the subject is unpleasant to me in a high degree. The priest *must* say his mass, so that we are not exactly paying for the Holy Sacrifice, but for its application by force of the priest's intention to our case. The doctrine of the priest's intention is the weakest part of the whole system; there is no *certainty* about anything in the Church of Rome, for that doctrine invalidates Ordination, Absolution, Consecration, and, in short, everything. Believe me, it is by *not* thinking that you will retain your respect for Rome. The laity on the Continent never trouble themselves about these matters. When *they* begin to think the clergy will begin to tremble."

I felt he was right. However, I went on for a few months with an excellent, kind-hearted priest, to whom I had been recommended, and all went pretty well until, as in my mother's case, the Cardinal's letter drove me, without one minute's delay, out of Rome.

In vain my Confessor assured me that the letter was "*not meant*" for me; *my* impression was that it was intended for all who read it. I had made some progress in the *simplicity* so much insisted on by Rome, and was actually simple enough to think that the Cardinal said what he meant, and meant what he said, so I took him at his word, and left that most complicated apparatus for saving men's souls, called

#### THE INFALLIBLE CHURCH.