

## CHAPTER III.

### THE SECRECY OF THE RITUALISTIC CONFESSIONAL

The Confessional always a secret thing—Confessional Scandal at Leeds—Dr. Pusey on the Seal of the Confessional—Ritualistic Sisters teach girls how to confess to priests—Secret Confessional books for penitents—Dr. Pusey revives the Confessional—Four years later writes against it—He hears Confessions in private houses—His penitent's "burning sense of shame and deceitfulness"—Bishop Wilberforce's opinion of Dr. Pusey—A Ritualistic priest's extraordinary letter to a young lady—How Archdeacon Manning heard Confessions on the sly—"A hole and corner affair."

**A**URICULAR Confession is always a secret thing. Both penitent and Father Confessor are expected to respect the secrecy of the Confessional. Were it a public transaction it would lose its attraction to a certain class of minds, and the power of the priest would cease to exist. It gives to the priest a power over the penitent which nothing can destroy but the grace of God. "I could never bear to meet him in the street," was the exclamation of a poor woman who had gone to Confession to her Vicar for more than a dozen years, but who, when I knew her, had learnt to be content with confessing her sins to Jesus Christ, and receiving direct from Him His all-sufficient absolution. She told me that whenever she saw her Father Confessor coming down the street towards her, she always went down a side street to avoid meeting him. The obligation of silence on the part of the penitent is thus

taught in a widely circulated little book, edited by the Tract Committee of the secret Society of the Holy Cross:—

“There is a mutual obligation between the Confessor and the person making Confession, to keep secret what is said. He is solemnly bound to secrecy, and you also are bound to observe a reverent and religious silence upon what has been said. Be very careful yourself on this point. If you talk about what has passed in Confession, the priest may get the blame of its being known.”<sup>1</sup>

The Confessional frequently interferes with the confidence which should exist between husband and wife. The wife will tell her Father Confessor things which she would not dare to mention to her husband; nor would she be expected ever to repeat to him the secret conversations between herself and her Confessor. An illustration of this took place in a Puseyite Church at Leeds, as far back as 1850. The Bishop of Ripon (Dr. Charles T. Longley, afterwards Archbishop of Canterbury) held an official and public inquiry as to a Confessional scandal connected with the Church of St. Saviour's, Leeds. After the inquiry he wrote, and published, a letter to the Vicar, the Rev. H. F. Beckett, from which I take the following extract:—

“It appeared in evidence,” wrote the Bishop, “which you did not contradict, and could not shake by any cross-examination, that Mr. Rooke, who was then a Deacon, having required a married woman who was a candidate for Confirmation to go for Confession to you as a priest, you received that female to Confession under these circumstances, and that you put to her questions which she says made her feel very much ashamed, and greatly distressed her, and which were of such an indelicate nature that she would never tell her husband of them.”<sup>2</sup>

Instead of trying to place the matter before Dr. Longley in a more favourable light, Mr. Beckett's reply to the

<sup>1</sup> *Pardon Through the Precious Blood*, edited by a Committee of Clergy, p. 31. Fifty-fourth thousand, 1883.

<sup>2</sup> *A Letter to the Parishioners of St. Saviour's, Leeds*, by the Bishop of Ripon, p. 37. London, 1851.

Bishop seemed to make the case even darker against himself, for he declared:—

“Your lordship cannot but see that Mrs. —’s not mentioning what had passed between her and myself to her husband is nothing at all to the purpose, since NO WOMAN WOULD, I SUPPOSE, EVER TELL HER HUSBAND WHAT PASSED IN HER CONFESSION.”<sup>3</sup>

On the part of the Ritualistic Father Confessor, secrecy must be observed, no matter what the consequences may be. Rather than divulge the secrets entrusted to him the Confessor is recommended by the Rev. Dr. Pusey to resort to that which common-sense people would call lying and perjury.

“No Confessor,” writes Dr. Pusey, “should ever give the slightest suspicion that he is alluding to what he has heard in the tribunal; but he should remember the canonical warning: ‘What I know through Confession, I know less than what I do not know.’ Pope Eugenius says that what a Confessor knows in this way, he knows it ‘ut Deus’; while out of Confession he is only speaking ‘ut homo’: so that, ‘as man,’ he can say that he does not know that which he has learned as God’s representative. I go further still: ‘As man he may swear with a clear conscience that he knows not, what he knows only as God.’”<sup>4</sup>

This is fearful teaching. Imagine the Confessor in an English Court of Justice. He is sworn to “tell the truth, the *whole* truth, and nothing but the truth” concerning the charge against the prisoner at the bar. He is asked, “Did the prisoner ever tell you that he stole those boots?” The Confessor has heard from the prisoner, in the Confessional, a full acknowledgment of his guilt, yet when asked this question, he may, according to Dr. Pusey, “swear with a clear conscience that he knows not, what he knows only as God.” There is another alternative which Dr. Pusey does *not* advise the Confessor to adopt. He might respectfully

<sup>3</sup> *A Letter to the Parishioners of St. Saviour’s, Leeds*, by the Bishop of Ripon, p. 38. London, 1851.

<sup>4</sup> Pusey’s *Manual for Confessors*, “Adapted to the Use of the English Church,” p. 402.

but firmly decline to answer concerning what he had heard in the Confessional, and then take the consequence like a courageous and honest man. But, instead of this, he is recommended to "swear," calling God's holy name to witness to the truth of a statement which he knows is a lie, and an abominable perjury! Is this the kind of teaching which ought to be given to the clergy of the Reformed Church of England? The book which contains it is a standard authority with Ritualistic Father Confessors.

Every effort is made by Ritualistic Confessors to bring young children, as well as adults, to the Confessional, even at a very tender age. Dr. Pusey teaches that it is "the ordinary and right custom among the faithful to bring young children to Confession from the time they are *seven years* old; and it is a great negligence of parents to omit doing so."<sup>5</sup> Sisters of Mercy sometimes help to bring the children to Confession. The "Sisters of the Church," otherwise known as the "Kilburn Sisterhood," and sometimes as the "Church Extension Association," have published several little books to teach little ones how to Confess to Priests.<sup>6</sup> The Sisters of St. Margaret's, East Grinstead, are expected to urge the girls under their care to make a full and complete Confession of their sins. Here are their instructions on this point, being the advice to them of their Founder and Father Confessor, the late Rev. Dr. Neale, as contained in their privately printed book, entitled, the *Spirit of the Founder. Dicit Fundator.*

"And this I say not so much about you, as about the confirmed girls. Whoever of you prepare these for their Communion, this above all things teach them, the great danger of a sacrilegious Confession: the utter uselessness as well as wickedness of each succeeding one, while that first sin remains unwiped out. And this more especially, that if any one of them leaves us in that state, in all

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 159.

<sup>6</sup> Such as their *Manual for the Children of the Church*, which has passed through several editions, but was suppressed when publicly exposed. It is also taught in several of their "Catechisms."

human probability she will never come out of it. Because, even granted that she is pressed about Confession, after she has gone out into the world, the sin will grow more and more terrible to look at : and if she kept it back from her first priest, small chance is there that she will have courage to make it known to a second." <sup>7</sup>

It is not uncommon for Ritualistic Father Confessors to circulate privately printed Manuals of Confession, for the use of children as well as adults. I have come across several of these. One is entitled *A Manual of Confession for Children*. "Translated and Adapted from the French. By a priest of the English Church. Privately printed." Even the printer's name is not given. As a specimen of the awful teaching thus imparted to our little ones, I quote the following from this *Manual* :—

"A good Confession ought not only to be humble and sincere, but also *full*. You must tell your Confessor *all* the sins you can remember. For if you hide one sin on purpose, you lie to God; you would be guilty of a great crime; and you would not even receive the pardon of those sins which you have confessed." <sup>8</sup>

When the practice of Auricular Confession was revived, about five years after the birth of the Tractarian Movement, great care was taken in keeping secret the numerous little books of devotion and manuals for Confession circulated amongst the Tractarians. The author of *Five Years in a Protestant Sisterhood, and Ten Years in a Catholic Convent*, published in 1869, relates her own experience in this matter, some fifteen years after Auricular Confession had been re-introduced. After mentioning some particulars concerning one of her lady friends, she proceeds :—

"We drove out together frequently, and from her I learned much of the habits and customs of the High Church party. She had all the little books of doctrine, which at that time had been 'adapted' from 'foreign sources;' all the little wonderful compilations about 'How to Prepare for a First Confession,' 'Prayers for the Penitential

<sup>7</sup> *The Spirit of the Founder*, p. 24. Privately printed for the use of the Sisters of St. Margaret's, East Grinstead.

<sup>8</sup> *A Manual of Confession for Children*, p. 12. Privately printed.

Seasons,' 'Devotions for the Holy Eucharist,' 'Hours for the Use of Members of the English Church,' which were 'privately printed,' and handed about with a thousand injunctions to secrecy, from one to another of the initiated."<sup>9</sup>

To the late Dr. Pusey is due the blame of reviving Auricular Confession in the Church of England. He commenced hearing Confessions in 1838. In 1850 Dr. Pusey wrote:—"It is now some twelve years, I suppose, since I was first called upon to exercise this office"—of Father Confessor,<sup>10</sup> that is, in 1838. Again, in 1851 he wrote to the Bishop of Oxford:—"What I say of Confession, I say upon the experience of *thirteen* years."<sup>11</sup> In a letter which he wrote to the *Times*, November 29th, 1866, Pusey remarked:—"During the *twenty-eight* years in which I have received Confessions, I never had once to refuse Absolution." Twenty-eight years from 1866 brings us back again to 1838. It seems almost incredible that four years after that date Dr. Pusey wrote a learned and thoroughly Protestant treatise to prove that in the early Church not a single trace can be found of private Confession to priests, with a view to thus obtaining God's pardon for sins! This appeared in 1842, in the form of lengthy "Notes" to the works of Tertullian, in the *Library of the Fathers*, extending from page 376 to page 408. In these notes Dr. Pusey quotes with decided approval the opinions of St. Chrysostom on the subject of Confession:—

"There could," wrote Dr. Pusey, "if Romanists would fairly consider this, be no way in which Confession to God alone, *exclusive of man*, could be expressed, if not here. S. Chrysostom says, 'to God alone,' 'apart in private,' 'to Him Who knoweth beforehand,' 'no one knowing,' 'no one present save Him Who knoweth,' 'God alone seeing,' 'unwitnessed,' 'not to man,' 'not to a fellow-servant,' 'within,' 'in the conscience,' 'in the memory,' 'Judging thyself' (in lieu of the Priest being the Judge), 'proving ourselves, each himself,

<sup>9</sup> *Five Years in a Protestant Sisterhood, and Ten Years in a Catholic Convent*, p. 15. London: Longmans, 1869.

<sup>10</sup> *Life of Dr. Pusey*, Vol. III., p. 269.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 335.

not the one to the other,' 'in Church, to God' (*i.e.*, in the General Confession). Accordingly, one Romanist writer boldly pronounces all these passages spurious; and (since they are unquestionable) another of great name, Petavius, condemns them as 'being uttered in a declamatory way to the ignorant multitude for the sake of impressiveness.' But certainly, poor as such an excuse would be for what, according to Romanists, is false teaching, the passages are too numerous and too uniform to admit of it; they manifestly contain S. Chrysostom's settled teaching,' and Petavius condemns them as 'devoid of sound meaning, if fitted to the rule of the exact truth.'"<sup>12</sup>

Dr. Pusey thus summarized the whole question from an historical point of view:—

"The instances, then, being in each case very numerous, the absence of any mention of Confession in the early Church under the following circumstances, does, when contrasted with the uniform mention of it in the later, put beyond question that at the earlier period it was not the received practice."<sup>13</sup>

Who would have thought that the man who thus held up to the admiration of English Churchmen the teaching of St. Chrysostom, of "Confession to God alone, exclusive of man," was at the very moment hearing Confessions himself, and had been hearing them for four years previously! The utmost caution was exercised by Dr. Pusey in his Confessional work, and his very great dread of publicity led to practices which were anything but straightforward. His underhand proceedings disgusted some of even his warmest friends. As early as 1850, the Rev. W. Maskell, one of his disciples who subsequently seceded to Rome, published a *Letter to Dr. Pusey*, in which he exposed his secret Confessional tactics:—

"What, then," wrote Mr. Maskell, "let me ask, do you conceive that the Bishop of Exeter would say, of persons *secretly received* [to Auricular Confession] *against the known wish of their parents*, of Confessions heard in the houses of common friends, or of *clandestine correspondence* to arrange meetings, under initials, or in envelopes

<sup>12</sup> "Library of the Fathers." *Tertullian*, p. 401. Oxford: J. H. Parker, 1842.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 405.

addressed to other persons?—and more than this, when such Confessions are recommended and urged as a part of the spiritual life, and among religious duties; not in order to quiet the conscience before receiving the Communion. Think not that I write all this to give you unnecessary pain; think not that I write it without a feeling of deep pain and sorrow in my own heart. But there is something which tells me, that, on behalf of thousands, this matter should now be brought before the world plainly, honestly, and fully. I know how heavily the *enforced mystery and secret correspondence regarding Confessions*, in your Communion, has weighed down the minds of many to whom you and others have 'Ministered.' I know how bitterly it has eaten, even as a canker, into their very souls: I know how utterly the specious arguments which you have urged, have failed to remove *their burning sense of shame and DECEITFULNESS*" (p. 21).

We get a further peep into Dr. Pusey's cautious mode of hearing Confessions, in Miss Cusack's ("The Nun of Kenmare") *Story of My Life*. This lady, in her early life, before her secession to Rome, was an inmate for some years of one of Dr. Pusey's sisterhoods.

"It was," writes Miss Cusack, "notable that no matter what the Doctor [Pusey] thought or said about the necessity of availing oneself of the 'Sacrament', he was very careful to whom he administered it. Further, it was well known that he administered the Sacrament of Confession, for the most part, in open defiance of the Bishop of the Diocese, where *he met his penitents, literally, 'on the sly.'* I believe that *the secrecy, and concealment*, and devices which had to be used to get an audience with the Doctor, for the purpose of Confessing, had a little, if it had not a good deal, to do with his success. The lady (few men went to Confession) who availed herself of the privilege, or who could obtain it, was looked upon with more or less holy envy, and felt correspondingly elated."<sup>14</sup>

It was at about this time that Dr. Pusey compiled, and secretly circulated, his *Hints for a First Confession*. Since his death they have been given to the world in the ordinary way, but for a period of upwards of thirty years after these *Hints* were first printed, I cannot find the slightest reference

<sup>14</sup> *The Story of My Life*, by M. F. Cusack, "The Nun of Kenmare," p. 63. London, 1891.

to them in any newspaper, biography, or any published book whatever. The world for that long period knew absolutely nothing about this little book, which all the while was working untold spiritual mischief in the Church of England. The teaching contained in these *Hints* was of a thoroughly Romanizing character. Here is an extract from the book, in proof of what I have said :—

“ A Confession [*i.e.*, to a priest] avails which contains all you can recall. If other sins come back to your mind afterwards, which you would have confessed had you remembered them, they should be confessed afterwards, because *the forgiveness is conditional upon the completeness of the Confession*. Completeness implies that there should be care and faithfulness in discovering sins, and that *nothing so discovered should be kept back*.”<sup>15</sup>

The High Church Bishop of Oxford (Dr. Samuel Wilberforce) was justly indignant with Dr. Pusey, when he fully realized the thoroughly Romanizing character of his Confessional work. For this, and for issuing “adapted” editions of Roman Catholic books, Bishop Wilberforce inhibited him, in November, 1850, from officiating in the diocese of Oxford, and did not remove the inhibition until nearly two years had passed by. On November 30th, 1850, the Bishop wrote to Dr. Pusey :—

“ You seem to me to be habitually assuming the place and doing the work of a Roman Confessor, and not that of an English clergyman. Now, I so firmly believe that of all the curses of Popery this is the crowning curse, that I cannot allow voluntarily within my charge the continuance of any ministry which is infected by it.”<sup>16</sup>

If the Bishops of the present day would only act as Bishop Wilberforce did, they would, unfortunately, find their hands full of this kind of work. The Confessional is now taught (in quite as Romish a form as that which was condemned by him) by thousands of nominally Church of England clergymen, who glory in what Dr. S. Wilberforce so truly termed

<sup>15</sup> *Hints for a First Confession*, by Dr. Pusey, p. 14. Edition, 1884.

<sup>16</sup> *Life of Bishop S. Wilberforce*, Vol. II., p. 90.

"the crowning curse" of Popery. Had the Bishops done their duty this "curse" would have been stamped out long ago.

A few other typical illustrations of the secrecy of the Confessional may here be added, out of many more which could easily be brought forward; the first from the year 1847; the second from the year 1853; and the third from 1872. The author of that well-known book, *From Oxford to Rome*, published in 1847, and written by one who was in full sympathy with the Tractarian Movement, informs us:—

"Confession the young Anglican has been accustomed to regard as one of his *secret privileges*. *Scarcely ever spoken of, even in the most confidential intercourse*, it is yet practised very extensively, and, as we believe, most beneficially, in the English Church."<sup>17</sup>

This is an important testimony, as coming from one who believed in the Confessional, and was not ashamed to acknowledge the mystery which surrounded its practice in his time.

The second instance is connected with the experience of the Rev. Lord Charles Thynne, who was for several years a clergyman in the Church of England, but seceded to Rome in 1853. After taking this decisive step his lordship addressed a lengthy letter to his late parishioners, giving his reasons for leaving the Church of England. The secrecy practised by the Tractarians with regard to Auricular Confession was one of those reasons.

"I believe," wrote Lord Charles Thynne, "that in order to obtain the remission of our sins by Absolution, it was necessary to confess them to some one possessed of authority to receive Confessions, and to give Absolution. I believe this to be necessary for all who have fallen into sin after Baptism. But when I had recourse to the only means within my reach, when I was a member of the Church of England, *I was pained by the very secret stealthy way in which alone my necessities could be met*, showing that so far as the Church of England was concerned there was something unreal and unauthorized in the act."<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> *From Oxford to Rome: and how it fared with some who lately took the Journey*, p. 205. London: Longmans, 1847.

<sup>18</sup> *Brown's Annals of the Tractarian Movement*, p. 296. Third edition.

The next illustration contains the unwilling testimony of a Ritualistic Father Confessor himself. At a meeting for the election of Proctors to Convocation, held at Durham, February 19th, 1874, the late Rev. G. T. Fox, a clergyman of high personal character, read to the audience a letter written by the Rev. Charles Jupp, a Ritualistic Father Confessor, to a young lady, making an appointment with her to receive her confession. The following was the letter read:—

“HOUGHTON-LE-SPRING. *May 26th, 1872.*

“MY DEAR MISS ——,—As usual, important letters are always delayed, and I fear my reply to yours of last week's date will not reach London till after you have left. I will, therefore, only say that I was very glad indeed to hear from you, and particularly on the subject you mentioned. I shall be quite ready and willing (in virtue of my office) to see you as you desire. *Mrs. —— has left, and we have the house to ourselves.* Parishioners are so constantly coming on business of one kind or another, that your visits would not be noticed. *Please do not hint anything to Mrs. Jupp, as I think all parochial affairs, of whatever kind, ought to be known to the priest only, and his lips sealed to every enquirer.* We should be so glad to see you back after your long absence.

“In great haste,

“Yours faithfully in Christ,

“CHARLES JUPP.”<sup>19</sup>

The late Cardinal Manning, in his Anglican days, while Archdeacon of Chichester, heard Confessions in the same stealthy manner. Mr. Purcell, his Roman Catholic biographer, relates that:—

“In his Diary, 1844-47, and in his letters to Laprimaudaye and Robert Wilberforce, Manning constantly makes use of the somewhat mysterious terms—*Under the Seal*, and *In Sacro*. To the initiated amongst High Church Anglicans these symbolic terms signified the Sacrament of Penance or Confession, and the Eucharistic Sacrifice; outside the Anglican community commonly called the Mass. These holy and wholesome Catholic doctrines Manning, as an Anglican, held and taught, if not in public, *in private*. In his sermons and

<sup>19</sup> *Church Association Monthly Intelligencer*, March, 1874, p. 98.

Charges he practised *οικονομία*; or *spoke under reserve*, or in mere outline, of Confession and the Eucharistic Sacrifice. But in his *private* exhortations he inculcated these Catholic doctrines *in all their fulness*. The Archdeacon of Chichester practised what he preached. He offered up, as I have shown, the Eucharistic Sacrifice for the quick and the dead. He received penitents in Confession; and exercising the power of the Keys, he loosed them from their sins; pronouncing in due form, whilst making over them the sign of the Cross, the words of Absolution.

“Protestant prejudice, popular ignorance, and the hostility of the authorities of their own Church, compelled the unhappy High Church Anglicans to cast a veil of mystery or secrecy over the practice of Confession. Instead of being an ordinary and common-place act of duty practised *coram ecclesia*, Confession amongst the Anglicans was, if I may so speak, a *hole-and-corner affair*, spoken of with bated breath, and carried on under lock and key.”<sup>20</sup>

There were other difficulties which Father Confessors had to contend with. The Rev. William J. Butler, Vicar of Wantage, and subsequently Dean of Lincoln, writing to Archdeacon Manning, August 29th, 1840, remarked:—“The difficulty with which, as Vicar of Wantage, I am confronted in the practice of hearing Confessions is the *opposition to be feared on the part of the husband* to the wife’s ‘opening her grief’ to another man.”<sup>21</sup> It is hardly to be wondered at that husbands should object to their wives going to Confession, more especially to bachelor priests, since, according to the opinion of one of those Father Confessors quoted above (p. 82), “no woman would, I suppose, ever tell her husband what passed in her Confession.” A married woman will tell her Father Confessor things which she would never dare to talk about to her own husband. Mr. Purcell throws some light on the secret way in which Archdeacon Manning heard the Confessions of his penitents:—

“It was a common practice for Manning, even in the days when in his Charges or sermons he was denouncing ‘Rómanism’ and the Popes, to hear Confessions at Lavington and Oxford, as well as at

<sup>20</sup> Purcell's *Life of Cardinal Manning*, Vol. I., p. 489.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 490.

Wantage and elsewhere. It must be admitted that 'the halo of romance' thrown round the practice of Confession—of which the Vicar of Wantage so feelingly complained, was in no small measure due to the mystery or secrecy attached to the performance of the act, even by Manning himself. At Lavington, for instance, it was his practice to walk from the Rectory to the Church at a time when no service was going on, and no congregation present; in a few minutes, by appointment, his penitent would follow. On one occasion, when a near relative of the Archdeacon's was staying with her family at the Rectory, the children, playing of an afternoon in the grounds, were surprised to see 'Uncle Henry' walking towards the church. No bell had rung for service; the church was closed. Presently *their mother* passed along the gravel walk in the same direction. In their eager curiosity to discover the meaning of this novel proceeding, the children scampered across the lawn to the church door, when their wondering eyes discovered 'Uncle Henry' seated on a big arm-chair with his back to the altar, and their mother kneeling on the altar step."<sup>23</sup>

The facts I have already mentioned tend to show that our Ritualistic Confessors resemble the Roman Catholic Confessors, as described by one of themselves:—

"The most responsible office of the priest of God," writes Father Augustine Wirth, O.S.B., "is the hearing of Confessions. . . in the pulpit he can touch certain sins only with kid gloves, in the Confessional he probes the sores to the very bottom. In the pulpit he must be a lion, *in the Confessional a fox.*"<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Purcell's *Life of Cardinal Manning*, Vol. I., pp. 492, 493.

<sup>24</sup> *The Confessional*, adapted by the Rev. Augustus Wirth, O.S.B., p. v. Fourth edition. Published at Elizabeth, New Jersey, 1882.