

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE SECRET HISTORY OF "THE PRIEST IN ABSOLUTION."

Part I. of the *Priest in Absolution*—Praised by the Ritualistic Press—  
Part II. secretly circulated amongst "Catholic" priests only—Lord Redesdale's exposure of the book in the House of Lords—Archbishop Tait says it is "a disgrace to the community"—Secret letter from the Master of the Society of the Holy Cross—Statement of the S. S. C.—Special secret Chapter of the Society to consider the *Priest in Absolution*—Full report of its proceedings, with speeches of the Brethren—Refuses to condemn the book—Discussion in Canterbury Convocation—Severe Episcopal Censures—Immoral Ritualistic Confessors ruin women; Testimony of Archdeacon Allen—Dr. Pusey's acknowledgments of the dangers of the Confessional; "It is the road by which a number of Christians go down to hell"—Another secret meeting of the Society of the Holy Cross—Reports of the speeches and resolutions—Some Bishops secretly friendly to the Society—Canon Knox-Little's connection with the Society of the Holy Cross—Strange and Jesuitical Proceedings at the Society's Synod.

FOR many years the Ritualistic Father Confessors possessed no book of their own to guide them in their work, and were therefore entirely dependent upon Roman Catholic books written in Latin, or French, and as many of these Confessors were by no means Latin scholars, and numbers of them knew nothing of French, it was at length found necessary to make an effort towards supplying this long-felt want. The work was undertaken by the Rev. J. C. Chambers, a well-known clergyman, who, in 1863, was Master of the secret Society of the Holy Cross. Instead, however, of writing an independent treatise on the Confessional, he contented himself with translating

and adapting a Roman Catholic work, written by the Abbé Gaume, which he issued under the now well-known title of the *Priest in Absolution*. It was divided into two parts. Part I. was published in 1866, and sold to the public; and a second edition was issued in 1869, but this was soon after withdrawn from *public* sale. When the first edition appeared it received a warm welcome from the Ritualistic press. The *Union Review* declared that it was "a golden treatise," "full of wisdom, sound teaching, and very valuable suggestions with regard to the Sacrament of Penance." But the reviewer evidently perceived a danger which was not realized by Mr. Chambers, for he wisely added that "It would have been far better to have issued the book in Latin."<sup>1</sup> No doubt it would have been "far better" for the Ritualistic Father Confessors had this warning been issued in time. It was clearly not wise to reveal to the English public in all its hideous deformity the moral filth of the Confessional. Had it been printed in Latin very few would have discovered its indecent character. The *Church Review* affirmed that the book could "be spoken of with the highest praise. It is a book which demands prayerful study, and our clerical readers will find it the greatest boon."<sup>2</sup>

The publication of the first half of the *Priest in Absolution* did not create any public excitement. Its unhappy birth appears to have been unnoticed by Protestant Churchmen. The second part was issued in 1872. It is dedicated "To the Masters, Vicars, and Brethren, of the Society of the Holy Cross," and the dedication states that it was "begun at their request." A note to the "Advertisement to the Reader" states that:—

"To prevent scandal arising from the curious or prurient misuse of a book which treats of spiritual diseases, it has been thought best that the sale should be confined to the clergy who desire to have at

<sup>1</sup> *Union Review*, Volume for 1867, p. 215.

<sup>2</sup> *Church Review*, March 23rd, 1867, p. 275.

hand a sort of vade-mecum for easy reference in the discharge of their duties as Confessors."

In this way the laity of the Church of England were kept in the dark as to what was going on. But not only was every effort made to keep the book out of their hands; but even ordinary Church of England clergymen were not allowed to purchase it, unless they were Father Confessors, or could give a reference to some well-known Ritualistic priest. One Church of England clergyman ventured to send Mr. Chambers himself stamps for a copy, and was not a little surprised on receiving the following reply:—

"18, SOHO SQUARE.

"DEAR SIR,—The book is only delivered to such priests of the English Church as are in the habit of hearing Confessions, or are known to me personally, or through friends. As your name is entirely unknown to me, I must require a reference to some well-known High Church priest, or I must return the stamps.

"J. C. CHAMBERS." <sup>3</sup>

When Mr. Chambers died there was a great danger lest the unsold copies of the *Priest in Absolution*—which was his private property—should be sold to some second-hand or other bookseller, and thus one of the great secrets of the Society of the Holy Cross should become widely known to the Protestants of England. There was no time to be lost. At the Monthly Chapter of the Society, held June 9th, 1874, a letter was read from the Rev. Joseph James Elkington, then Curate of St. Mary's, Soho, asking the Society to buy the copyright from the executors of Mr. Chambers. After some discussion, it was moved by the Treasurer, the Rev. John Andrews Foote, seconded by the Rev. E. M. Chaplain, and carried unanimously:—"That the copyright of the *Priest in Absolution* having been offered to the Society, the brethren be requested to subscribe towards the purchase, such subscriptions to be returned out of the proceeds of sale."<sup>4</sup> In the official report of the Chapter at which this resolution was passed, a special notice was issued, stating

<sup>3</sup> *The Rock*, June 6th, 1873, p. 391.

<sup>4</sup> *S. S. C. June Chapter*, 1874, p. 2.

that "the probable value of the copyright, together with the copies of the book on hand, is £100," and asking the brethren to lend £5 each towards the cost, the book when paid for to "remain the property of S. S. C." The subject was mentioned again at the next Monthly Chapter, but, as only one £5 had been promised, nothing definite was done, though a letter was read from Mr. Elkington, asking for a higher price. Matters, however, made rapid progress during the next month, for, at the August Chapter, the Master of the Society of the Holy Cross announced to the brethren that the "Copyright was now the property of the Society; the difficulties relating to the purchase having been satisfactorily settled."<sup>5</sup> However that may have been, on the following month the money had not all been paid, for the Treasurer of the Society had to issue, in that month, a special circular, announcing that £25 was still due to the executors of Mr. Chambers. From the "Balance Sheet" of the Society, presented to its September Synod, 1874, it appears that the copyright and stock of the *Priest in Absolution* had been bought for £75, or £25 less than was first asked for it. By a resolution passed at the May, 1875, Synod of the Society, it was decided that the money "lent by brethren for the purchase of the *Priest in Absolution*, be repaid out of the balance in hand of the general fund of the Society."<sup>6</sup> Part I. of the *Priest in Absolution* was sold to the public for 2s 6d; Part II. was sold to the brethren at 5s 4d, post free. How many copies were sold before the Society acquired the copyright I have no means of ascertaining; but after that date there must have been a considerable sale, to judge by the balance sheets of the Society of the Holy Cross. That for May, 1875, reported the sale of copies to the value of £20. 7s 6d; for May, 1876, £38. 17s 4d; September, 1876, £4. 11s 4d; and in September, 1877, £9. 16s 11d—making a total of £73. 13s 1d.

<sup>5</sup> S. S. C. *August Chapter*, 1874, p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> S. S. C. *Analysis of Proceedings of May Synod*, 1875, p. 6.

On June 14th, 1877, the late Lord Redesdale exposed the *Priest in Absolution* in the House of Lords. His lordship was not a fanatic, nor could anyone fairly describe him as an Evangelical Churchman. On the contrary he was, says Dr. Davidson, the present Bishop of Winchester, "a sober and trusted High Churchman, of the earlier sort."<sup>7</sup> Lord Redesdale quoted from the book itself, which he held in his hand. After this exposure it was commonly reported by the Ritualists that his lordship's copy had been stolen for his use from the library of a Ritualistic priest. No one, however, ventured to name the clergyman who had lost his copy, and as a matter of fact there was not a word of truth in the rumour. The copy was obtained in a perfectly honourable and straightforward manner by the late Mr. Robert Fleming. This false rumour was repeated again at Brighton, during the summer of 1890, by the Rev. C. Hardy Little, Vicar of St. Martin's, Brighton; but at a great public meeting held in the Dome, Brighton, on June 20th of that year, Mr. Fleming himself appeared on the platform, and told to the vast audience, which included a considerable number of Ritualists, the true story of how he came into possession of the *Priest in Absolution*, and his version of the case has never since been challenged by the Ritualists. Mr. Fleming, who held the original copy of the book in his hand, from which Lord Redesdale had quoted in the House of Lords, said that a gentleman occupying a prominent position in the Church of England had given it to him, at his request, for some little service which he had been enabled to render to him. As he presented him with the book that gentleman said smilingly to him, "you won't make a bad use of it?" To which he replied, "All right." The statement that the book was stolen, he emphatically declared, was an absolute falsehood.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> *Life of Archbishop Tait*, Vol. II., p. 171. First edition.

<sup>8</sup> *English Churchman*, June 26th, 1890, p. 415.

Lord Redesdale, in the course of his speech in the House of Lords, quoted largely from the *Priest in Absolution*, to prove that it was a grossly indecent and abominable book. Some of the portions read were so vile that, as the Right Rev. Biographer of Archbishop Tait informs us, "many of the quotations were necessarily withheld from publication either in the newspapers or in *Hansard*."<sup>9</sup> Lord Redesdale concluded his speech by saying:—

"I must say, my Lords, that I think it high time the laity should move in this matter. Hitherto it has been treated too much as one exclusively for the clergy. In calling your lordship's attention to the subject, I am actuated simply by a sense of duty, for I feel that the time has arrived when there should be a decided condemnation of such practices."<sup>10</sup>

The Archbishop of Canterbury (Dr. Tait) addressed the House, after Lord Redesdale sat down. He said:—

"The fact that such a book should be printed and circulated is to my mind a matter of very great concern. The Noble Earl spared us from many details; but, at the same time, he read quite enough to show that *no modest person could read the book without regret*, and that **IT IS A DISGRACE TO THE COMMUNITY** that such a book should be circulated under the authority of clergymen of the Established Church. . . . I cannot imagine that any right-minded man could wish to have such questions [as those suggested in the *Priest in Absolution*] addressed to any member of his family; and if he had any reason to suppose that any member of his family had been exposed to such an examination, I am sure it would be the duty of any father of a family to remonstrate with the clergyman who had put the questions, and warn him never to approach his house again."<sup>11</sup>

As a result of this exposure great excitement was created in the minds of all loyal Churchmen, who were righteously indignant at learning the filthy character of the Ritualistic Confessional, as revealed in the *Priest in Absolution*. That indignation was greatly strengthened when, a few weeks

<sup>9</sup> *Life of Archbishop Tait*, Vol. II., p. 172.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 172.

<sup>11</sup> *Church Association Monthly Intelligencer*, August, 1877, pp. 314-316.

later, the late Rev. A. H. Mackonochie, of St. Alban's, Holborn (who was for many years Master of the Society of the Holy Cross) published a correspondence which he had with another clergyman, in which he declared concerning the *Priest in Absolution*, that "Its principles are those which govern, I believe, all Confessors among ourselves."<sup>13</sup> The daily papers of the United Kingdom, almost without exception, gave expression to the feelings of the country, in leading articles condemning the Society of the Holy Cross, and its Confessional book, in the severest terms. About two months after the exposure Lord Abergavenny forwarded to the Archbishop of Canterbury an address on the subject signed by peers and noblemen of England, Ireland, and Scotland, in which they expressed their "sorrow and deep indignation at the extreme indelicacy and impropriety of the questions therein [in the *Priest in Absolution*] put to married and unmarried women and children." This address was signed by the Duke of Westminster, the Duke of Wellington, the Duke of St. Albans, the Duke of Manchester, the Duke of Grafton, the Duke of Leinster, the Marquises of Abergavenny, Bristol, Ailesbury, Conyngham, and Hertford; the Earls of Redesdale, Jersey, Harrowby, Fortescue, Cork, Morley, Fitzwilliam, Clancarty, Sydney, Bessborough, Seafield, Cadogan, Ilchester, Mansfield, Normanton, Harewood, Spencer, Bantry, Desart, Camperdown, Manvers, Lucan, Arran, Bradford, Shaftesbury, Roden, Haddington, Cowper, Darnley, Donoughmore, Chichester, Dunmore, Elphinstone, and Longford; by Viscounts Hardinge, Middleton, Hawarden, Lifford, Strathallen, Powerscourt, Sidmouth, and Torrington; and also by Lords Sondes, Henniker, Leconsfield, Wynford, Hampton, Ebury, Rivers, Sandys, Churchill, Bolton, Cottesloe, Oranmore, Talbot de Malahide, Clonbrock, Dynevor, Forester, Walsingham, Digby, Dorchester, Foley, Denman,

<sup>13</sup> *The Priest in Absolution and the Society of the Holy Cross: a Correspondence between a London Priest and A. H. Mackonochie*, p. 17.

Abinger, Crofton, Zouche, Ruthven, Penrhyn, Chelmsford, Huntingfield, Inchiquin, Colchester, Enfield, Eversley, Waveney, Airey, Ellenborough, Delamere, Ventry, Bateman, and Dudley.

I now proceed to relate the attitude adopted by the Society of the Holy Cross towards the exposure of the *Priest in Absolution*. My authorities for what I shall record are mainly the secret documents of the Society in my possession. Two days before Lord Redesdale's exposure, viz., on June 12th, at the Monthly Chapter of the Society, the Rev. Robert James Wilson, who subsequently became Warden of Keble College, Oxford, called the attention of the brethren to the notice which Lord Redesdale had given of his intention to bring the *Priest in Absolution* to the attention of the House of Lords. "After some conversation," says the official report of the proceedings, "it was decided that the Master should be left to use his own discretion in dealing with the matter."<sup>12</sup> The "Master" at that time was the Rev. F. Ll. Bagshawe, Vicar of St. Barnabas', Pimlico. On June 25th this gentleman sent out to the brethren the following printed letter:—

"ST. BARNABAS, PIMLICO.

"June 25th, 1877.

"P. ✠ T.

"DEAR BROTHER,—I think it will be satisfactory to you to know that I have not remained inactive during the present attack upon our Society in connection with the *Priest in Absolution*. The Bishops have referred the book to a Committee, consisting of the Archbishop of Canterbury, and the Bishops of London, Winchester, Gloucester and Bristol, and Ely. This Committee has asked us to meet them on Thursday, the 28th. I have reason to think that the Bishops are disposed to be friendly. The whole question was discussed at a Meeting of the Council, including the Assessors, on Saturday. You shall have immediate information when anything further is done.

<sup>12</sup> S. S. C. *June Chapter*, 1877, p. 6.

I have decided also not to accept the resignation of any brethren for the present, not to print the Roll of members, nor to permit the distribution of the *Priest in Absolution* until after the September Synod.

“ You would perhaps like to know the true relation of S. S. C. to the *Priest in Absolution*. Some years ago, the Society requested Br. Chambers to prepare a book on the subject; when he had done so, he published the first part of the *Priest in Absolution*, but retained the second part for private circulation. It was entirely his own work, and executed on his own responsibility: its sheets were never submitted to the Society. When he died, the whole remaining stock would have been sold by his executors, and have been exposed for public sale.

“ In order to prevent an action so contrary to the compiler’s wish, and hurtful to the Society, to whom it was dedicated, we bought the book, and have been responsible for a limited and cautious supply to priests of known character.

“ Believe me,

“ Yours Faithfully,

“ In D. N. J. C.,

“ FRANCIS LL. BAGSHAWE.”

There was need for Mr. Bagshawe’s action in refusing to accept the resignations of the brethren for the time being. The more timid of the brethren were thoroughly frightened by the exposure which had taken place, more especially after the *Rock* had published a complete list of their names and addresses, which made them most anxious to leave an organization that had brought them into trouble with their parishioners. The Master acknowledges that the Society was “ responsible for a limited and cautious supply to priests of known character ” of the now notorious Confessional book; and it is quite evident from the whole of his letter how greatly the Society dreaded the light of publicity being thrown on its dark underground proceedings. There is reason to believe that most of the brethren who at this period left the Society did so, not because they disapproved of the Society or the *Priest in Absolution*, but simply through fear. The fact that scarcely any of them publicly repudiated

either the one or the other is a proof of this. There were, however, a few exceptions, of which the most remarkable was that of the Rev. Frank N. Oxenham—he joined the S. S. C. in 1872—who, as early as June 19th, wrote to the Archbishop of Canterbury :—

“When, in consequence of your Grace’s observations, I looked into the book, I felt that no words could be too strong to condemn the principles advocated, and the advice given in that book as to the questioning of persons who came to Confession. If the practice of Confession involved, which it certainly does not, any such questioning, I should regard it with abhorrence. I am sure, my Lord, that a very large number of the members of the Society of the Holy Cross are as ignorant as I was of the contents of this unhappy book, and would repudiate its principles in the matter to which I have alluded as sincerely and utterly as I do. In justice to those persons, as well as to myself, I am venturing to trouble your Grace with this communication. I very deeply regret that the Society of the Holy Cross ever came into possession of this book, and I shall take the earliest opportunity open to a private member, to move that all remaining copies of the second part of the *Priest in Absolution* be forthwith destroyed.”<sup>14</sup>

This condemnation of the *Priest in Absolution*, I may here remark, came from one who was for many years an advanced Ritualist, and is therefore all the more valuable on that account, as showing its mischievous and dangerous character. Unfortunately for Mr. Oxenham’s opinion, a “very large number of the members” of the Society of the Holy Cross did *not* “repudiate its principles.” The proposal that the Society should burn the remaining copies in its possession was brought forward, though not by Mr. Oxenham, at the May Synod, 1878, when the following resolution was carried by thirty-four to eight :—“That this Synod is not in favour of the destruction of the remaining copies of the *Priest in Absolution* at the present time.”<sup>15</sup> The Society would not even allow that there was any possibility of the advice on

<sup>14</sup> *Life of Archbishop Tait*, Vol. II., p. 174.

<sup>15</sup> *S. S. C. Analysis of the May Synod*, 1878, p. 16.

questioning, contained in the book, being misused, for when Mr. Oxenham, at the Special Chapter, held July 5th, 1877, moved that "the advice given in this book as to questioning penitents is at least liable to injurious misuse," his motion was lost. The report of the proceedings does not state how many voted for or against it.<sup>16</sup>

On the day before Lord Redesdale's speech the Master of the Society of the Holy Cross wrote to the Bishop of London on the subject, and informed him that the *Priest in Absolution* could "only be obtained by those who are known clergymen of the Church of England," and that "very few copies" had in consequence been distributed; and stating that "the Society bought the work up at considerable pecuniary loss." These statements can scarcely be described as accurate. The official statements of receipts for the sales before the Master wrote this letter, quoted above, clearly prove that there had been what may be fairly termed a *considerable* sale for such a work. As we have seen, £75 was paid for the copyright, and £73. 13s 1d had already been received from the sales. Where, then, was the "considerable pecuniary loss"? In addition to these sales, it is well to remember that Mr. Chambers himself must have sold a considerable number of copies before the Society purchased the book. Was it, therefore, truthful for Mr. Bagshawe to inform the Bishop that only a "very few copies" had been distributed? I think not. And was there not something like equivocation in the Master's further statement to the Bishop:—"I venture to assert that the great body of these clergy are not acquainted with the contents of this book, and some scarcely know of its existence"? The Master, in this letter, also informed the Bishop that the Rev. J. C. Chambers had compiled the book. This was startling news for the Bishop, who, in his reply to the Master's letter, wrote:—

"Few things have ever given me more pain than the very unex-

<sup>16</sup> *Minutes of the Special Chapter*, p. 11.

pected information that the late Mr. Chambers was the compiler of that volume which I have seen, and that you were Master of the Society which owns and circulates it. I am, of course, aware of the line of defence indicated by the term professional character; but I must say that, in my judgment, a system of Confession which makes such a book necessary or even useful to the Confessor, carries with it its own condemnation."

The Bishop's letter shows how carefully the leading authorities of the S. S. C. had kept their proceedings from the knowledge of their own Diocesan. Mr. Bagshawe's next letter to the Bishop was written on the day after the exposure in the House of Lords, and contained the following paragraph:—

"As you have written to me in such a kind way, I am quite entitled to tell you, as my Bishop, that I have never thought the book a useful one, or recommended it to others. It is a matter of sorrow that some of us differ with our Bishops at all, but I cannot help feeling, after listening to a debate such as that on Thursday night, that our practice with regard to Confession is very widely misapprehended. One of my objections to the *Priest in Absolution* is that its language is not calculated to remove that misapprehension."

It would be interesting to know what other objections the Master had to the book, which he in no way condemns as bad in itself. Yet the unsold copies of the book were, as he subsequently acknowledged, kept in his own care, and therefore no copies could have been circulated without his knowledge and sanction. In his Address to the May Synod, 1878, he said:—"Hitherto the book has been in my care—now it will cease to be so."<sup>17</sup> It is evident, therefore, that his letters to the Bishop of London were written for a purpose, viz., that of making his lordship think more highly of the Master than he really deserved. Actions speak more strongly than words, and Mr. Bagshawe's words seem to contradict his actions.

The interview of the representatives of the Society of the Holy Cross with the Bishops took place at Lambeth Palace,

<sup>17</sup> S. S. C. *Master's Address*, delivered at the May Synod, 1878, p. 6.

on Thursday, June 28th. The representatives were the Master of the Society, together with the following members of his secret Council:—The Rev. C. F. Lowder, Vicar of St. Peter's, London Docks; the Rev. Joseph Newton Smith, founder of the Society of the Holy Cross; the Rev. F. H. Murray, Rector of Chislehurst; the Rev. H. D. Nihill the Rev. R. J. Wilson, subsequently Warden of Keble College; the Rev. John William Kempe; and the Rev. G. Noel Freeling, the latter of whom, however, was not on the "Council." To the surprise of these gentlemen, instead of meeting the Bishops they expected, they found waiting for them the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, and the Bishop of London only. The Master had brought with him a carefully-prepared *Statement to the Bishops*; but he was only allowed to read about one-half of it, the remainder was sent to the Bishops on the following Saturday. This *Statement*, which, with the correspondence already alluded to, was subsequently printed for private circulation amongst the brethren, commenced with an account of the nature and objects of the Society of the Holy Cross, and then proceeded to give the history of its connection with the *Priest in Absolution*, which has, I think, already been sufficiently related above. But I may quote the following extract from the *Statement*, as having an important bearing on the revival of Auricular Confession in the Church of England:—

"All, or nearly so," said Mr. Bagshawe, "of our members had, as a matter of fact, found the blessing of Confession; and very many of them were constantly applied to by those who desired to share in that blessing. Perpetually, at our meetings, questions of difficulty were asked, as our members began to learn the existence of sin and its power in their parishes. They felt the need of guidance in the ministry to which they believed themselves to be called. Under these circumstances, the Rev. J. C. Chambers was asked, I believe informally, and before I joined the Society in 1868, to undertake a work for their assistance, adapted to the needs of the Church of England and the state of modern society. It was felt that they could not have made a better choice. He possessed, more than any of their

number, the confidence of the Bishops for prudence, learning, moral integrity, and purity of purpose. His experience was vast. Members of both Houses of Parliament, Clergy, Barristers, Merchants, Tradesmen, and Costermongers were amongst his penitents. In 1869 the first part of the work was published. It was entirely on Mr. Chambers's own responsibility. The Society was responsible for the request, but not for the manner of execution. In 1872 or 1873, the second part was brought out."

Mr. Bagshawe made a singular error in stating that the first part was published in 1869. It was, as I have already mentioned, published in 1866, and the second edition was published in 1869. The Bishops referred to as having "confidence" in Mr. Chambers could hardly have been aware of his advanced Romanizing views, or that he was Father Confessor to so many influential people. The second half of that gentleman's official *Statement* to the Bishops consisted of an apology for the *Priest in Absolution*, concerning which he had, as we have seen, written but a few days before, that "he had never thought the book a useful one"; but of which he *now* affirmed that it was "a work upon an important subject from which good might be gained by those who read it with a right motive." "I consider," he continued, "very many propositions in the *Priest in Absolution* doubtful, and from some I completely disagree. Yet I should be very far from saying that the discussion of such questions is not productive of good." The Master next proceeded to call attention to the "various cautions with which the book abounds"; but goes on very candidly to acknowledge that:—

"We believe that in certain cases *questions must be asked of the penitent*, partly to clear what has been ambiguous in his statement, and partly to help him to confess what he really wishes to say, but is hindered in saying from shyness. In no case should any new matter be imported, unless there is very strong reason to believe that something has been suppressed, and then it should be approached with the utmost care."

It was evidently the desire of the Master to move as much

of the blame as possible from the Society of the Holy Cross, but he utterly failed in impressing the Bishops with his view of the case. Instead of repudiating the book altogether, he asserted that "no harm has been done by the kind of circulation which the Society has permitted." One result of this interview, as recorded in the official and privately circulated report of the proceedings, was "the surrender of a copy of the *Priest in Absolution* to the Archbishop, and the promise of a surrender of the Statutes. The Master took the Statutes and the Office Book to the Archbishop on the following day." On June 30th, the Archbishop of Canterbury wrote to Mr. Bagshawe:—"I understand from you that a meeting of your Society will be held on Thursday of next week. Let me, through you, urge upon the Society the duty of at once repudiating the book which has caused so much alarm. This is due both to yourselves and to the Church. It is absolutely necessary that I should be in possession, not later than Thursday evening, of any resolutions you pass." The reason for the Archbishop's haste was that on the following day, July 6th, the subject was to be discussed by the Bishops in the Upper House of Canterbury Convocation, and they had postponed the consideration of the subject for a day, to suit the convenience of the Society.

On Thursday, July 5th, a "Special Chapter" of the Society of the Holy Cross, to consider the action of the Society, was held at 5, Greville Street, Brooke Street, Holborn. Seventy-five brethren were present. Fortunately, I have come into possession of the official and secret report of this very secret meeting, held in a private house. From this I learn that the Master informed his brethren that it was "his opinion that unless the Society yielded to some extent to the wishes of the Bishops, we were in danger of a synodical statement by the Upper House against the Sacraments of the Catholic Church. To avert this, which would cause the gravest anxiety to many of the clergy and

the laity, he advised the Chapter to pass a resolution to stop the further circulation of the *Priest in Absolution*." Canon T. F. Carter, of Clewer, who was the next speaker, moved a resolution, thanking the Master for the statement laid before the Bishops, and expressing "general approval of the same." This was seconded by the Rev. George Davenport Nicholas, Vicar of St. Stephen's, Clewer, and carried unanimously. Before it was passed, however, there was some grumbling on the part of a few of the brethren. The Rev. C. D. Goldie "thought that the Society had been betrayed into too hasty action"; while the Rev. A. H. Stanton, Curate of St. Alban's, Holborn, revealed the fact that "the Council was not unanimous" in its action, and that he and the Rev. Henry Aston Walker, now Vicar of Chattisham, Ipswich, "had strongly opposed the idea of a deputation." The well-known Rev. A. H. Mackonochie said that he "was one of the Master's Council who had been averse to any deputation to the Bishops at all." He believed that the Bishops "had got up this attack" upon the Society, and desired to fix upon it the stigma of "indecent publications." "He warned the brethren that if they gave up the book, they would not escape the stigma."

The Chapter next proceeded to read letters from absent brethren, including one from the Rev. Dr. Littledale, and also a resolution passed by the Edinburgh Local Chapter of the Society, to the effect that "the Society's further connection with the book was undesirable." On the other hand, the Cheltenham Local Chapter had sent up a resolution to the effect that it "was opposed to any repudiation of the book." The Rev. C. F. Lowder next addressed the meeting, and for politic reasons recommended "the Chapter to withdraw the book from circulation." He concluded by reading a further Statement which had been drawn up, he said, with the assistance of the Rev. T. W. Perry and Dr. Walter Phillimore (now Sir Walter Phillimore, Bart., q.c.). This statement was discussed by the

Chapter, and after several amendments had been adopted, was carried unanimously. Thereupon Canon T. T. Carter moved that,—

“The Society presents this Statement to the Right Reverend the Bishops and the Reverend the Clergy in Convocation assembled, in deference to the expressed desire of the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, and the Bishop of London, whom the delegates of the Society met at Lambeth. In deference to the expression of the desire on their part, the Society has determined that no further copies of the book shall be supplied.”

In moving this resolution Canon Carter said that he, “while revising the proof sheets of the work, had recommended the author to publish it in Latin.” He was in favour of withdrawing the book “because we cannot heartily endorse it as a whole”; and “because the Bishops ask us to give the book up.” The Rev. Charles Bodington (now Diocesan Missioner for Lichfield) supported the motion. He said that he did so “because it kept clear of any condemnation of the book. While he should consider it *injudicious* to endorse the book as it stands, he thought that withdrawing it in deference to the Bishops’ wishes need not make the slightest difference in our teaching and practice with regard to Confession.” The Rev. William Crouch, now Vicar of Gamlingay, however, “believed our position would be weakened by giving up the book. No doubt the book was imperfect, but as much might be said of all books, save one.” The Rev. F. N. Oxenham “considered that the charges had been fairly brought against the book, though parts of it are exceedingly valuable, yet the general tone of the work, though guarded, he held to be deeply injurious if generally used. He felt that the Society ought to condemn the book.” This courageous statement of Brother Oxenham appears to have received no encouragement from the brethren present, for, when he proposed an amendment embodying his views, it was lost. After a good deal of further discussion, with the consent of Canon Carter, the

following resolution was passed, by twenty-eight against twenty, instead of that proposed by Brother Oxenham :—

“That, under these considerations, the Society of the Holy Cross, while distinctly repudiating the unfair criticisms which have been passed on the book called the *Priest in Absolution, and without intending to imply ANY condemnation of it*, yet, in deference to the desire expressed by the Archbishop of Canterbury to the representatives of the Society, resolves that no further copies of it be supplied.”

This was a most important resolution. By it the Society declined to censure the book either in whole or in part. Mr. Oxenham proposed to insert the words “as a whole” after “condemnation of it”; but his proposal was rejected by twenty-one to eighteen. The promise to withdraw the *Priest in Absolution* from circulation served its purpose very well with the Bishops in Convocation the next day; but it was a promise which was valueless, for it was subsequently repudiated by the Society as a whole, very much to the annoyance of the Master of the Society, who considered, as we shall see presently, that by repudiating the resolution of the Special Chapter the Society had broken faith with the Bishops, and in such a way as to compel him, as an honourable man, to resign his position as Master of the Society of the Holy Cross. Before this Special Chapter closed the Rev. James Benjamin Parker said “he was prepared to move that a copy of the Society’s Roll” of the Brethren should be given to the Bishops. But the Master very soon put a stop to Brother Parker’s injudicious proposals. He informed the Chapter that he had already refused to give a copy to the Archbishop. Mr. Bagshawe was evidently too wide awake to do anything of the kind. There is nothing, I am certain, that the Society of the Holy Cross dreads more than that the names of its members shall be known to the general public. They could not even trust the secret to one Archbishop!

On Friday, July 6th, the Upper House of Canterbury met to consider the *Priest in Absolution*. There were present, in

addition to the Archbishop of Canterbury, who, of course, presided, the Bishops of London, Llandaff, Gloucester and Bristol, Norwich, Hereford, St. Albans, Lichfield, Bath and Wells, Chichester, Salisbury, Oxford, and St. Asaph. Not one of these Prelates, whether High Churchmen or Evangelicals, had one word to say in favour of either the *Priest in Absolution*, or the Society of the Holy Cross, which they held responsible for the book. They unanimously condemned both the one and the other, though some of them bore testimony to the personal character of some of the members of the Society. My readers may find a *verbatim* report of the speeches of these Prelates, on this remarkable occasion, in the *Chronicle of Convocation*, Sessions July 3-6, 1877, pages 310-336. My quotations from the speeches are taken from this official report.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, who, in the course of his speech, presented to the Bishops the resolutions of the Special Chapter of the S. S. C. passed the previous day, said:—"The persons with whom we have now to deal, it appears to me, have adopted a system altogether alien from the system of the Church of England, which yet might not find its natural home, under existing circumstances, in the exaggerated Ultramontane form of the present Roman Catholic Church. This system must seek a home somewhere else than in the Reformed Protestant Church of England. . . I am sure your lordships will agree with me that it will be most dangerous to allow them in this Church powers to propagate doctrines, to introduce and carry into effect practices which are entirely alien from the spirit and teaching of the whole body of the Divines of the Church of England from first to last." The Archbishop then called attention to a little confessional book for children, "Edited by a Committee of Clergy," and entitled "Books for the Young," No. I., *Confession*. It must have had, he said, a very wide circulation, for the copy from which he quoted was one of the "Eighth Thousand." He said that he did

not know who the "Committee" were who were responsible for that book. He trusted that they were few in number, and not more than two or three. What would he have said, if he had known that this little book, which he so sternly condemned, was, in reality, issued by the Society of the Holy Cross, but without its name being attached to it? Of course the Society was too wise to enlighten Dr. Tait on this important subject. The little book taught that little children from six and a-half years old should go to Confession; and these little ones were instructed that, "It is to the priest, and to the priest only, that the child must acknowledge his sins, if he desires that God should forgive him." In conclusion his Grace said, "I have now given your lordships all the information that I have on this subject; I do it with the greatest pain. I do it with a full appreciation of the goodness of the men with whom we have to deal: but no admiration of any points in their character ought, I think, to make us hesitate as to whatever may appear to be our duty in the endeavour to counteract *what I feel obliged to call a CONSPIRACY within our own body* against the doctrine, the discipline, and the practice of our Reformed Church."

The Bishop of London said that in the First Part of the *Priest in Absolution* there are some pages which contain things as bad as are to be found in the Second Part. He noticed that, by the resolution of the Society of the Holy Cross which had been sent to them, the remaining copies of the *Priest in Absolution* were not to be destroyed, but none others are to be supplied. "There, consequently," said the Bishop, who evidently suspected trickery, "they are to remain, and at some future opportunity, when the opinion of the Society undergoes a change, I presume they will again be available as they have hitherto been." "I shall," he continued, "ask your lordships to permit me to move, in the first place, that this House holds the Society of the Holy Cross responsible for the preparation and dissemination

of the book called the *Priest in Absolution*. The question is, how far they have by their resolutions withdrawn that responsibility; and I am afraid I must say that they have not withdrawn it at all. They have not repudiated the book, nor expressed their regret that it has been published. They have given no opinion in condemnation of it; on the contrary, they say they do not intend to imply any condemnation of it, though, in deference to the desire expressed by the Archbishop, no further copies of it will be supplied. I shall, therefore, ask your lordships to agree to a resolution to this effect :—

“That this House, having considered the first resolution appended to the “Statement of the Society of the Holy Cross, presented to this House on Friday, July 6th, 1877,” is of opinion that the Society has neither repudiated nor effectually withdrawn from circulation the aforesaid work.’”

The Bishop of London then proceeded with his speech, and termed the little book on Confession, quoted by the Archbishop, “a wretched little book,” after which he moved this further resolution :—

“That this House hereby expresses its strong condemnation of any doctrine or practice of Confession which can be thought to render such a book necessary or expedient.”

The Bishop of Llandaff seconded the resolutions. He said :—“It appears to me, after reading a good deal of this book, that it and its papers are books and papers which ought to appear within the pale of the Roman Catholic Church, and not within the pale of the Church of England.” In conclusion, the Bishop expressed his belief that dispensed Jesuits had in the past worked mischief within the Protestant Churches. “I am very unwilling,” he said, “to suppose that anything of the kind is done at the present day, but this is an important fact in history which at any rate may well be borne in mind.”

The Bishop of St. Albans, who was a High Churchman, said :—“I think it is high time that some restraint should

be placed on the doctrine and practice of Confession that has become prevalent among us lately. I was, of course, well aware that this practice was beginning to prevail to a great extent ; but I do not think it ever impressed itself on my mind so fully as it did when, on Good Friday last, I took part in the service, for the first time in many years, in a church which has acquired a very unenviable notoriety—I mean the Church of St. James's, Hatcham. In looking over that church after the service had concluded I saw in a transept or side chapel—I saw with my own eyes—a Confessional of the Church of Rome, with its seat for the Confessor, a place for the penitent to kneel upon, curtains, and the usual paraphernalia of such places. Now, I do not wish to say one unkind word concerning the Incumbent of that church, although I must say his conduct has cost me the most miserable weeks of the whole of my Episcopate. I repeat that I do not wish to say anything unkind of him ; but I cannot forget on the present occasion that he is an office-bearer in this Society of the Holy Cross." The Bishop concluded by supporting the resolution. I may here note that Confessional Boxes, which so astonished the late Bishop of St. Albans, have now become very common in Ritualistic churches. The Bishops have the power to remove them, but, with a very few exceptions, they refuse to use their powers. Many of them can *talk* against Popery in the Church of England, but the laity are asking, Why do they not *act* ? We need *deeds* more than *words* in these dangerous days.

The next speaker was the High Church Bishop of Lichfield (Dr. Selwyn). He said:—"I must say, from the observation which I have made of the documents placed before us, that they do contain the very gravest elements of suspicion, and that they would make me—although I do not pledge myself as to my future course either as regards an Incumbent or a Curate—entertain doubts as to whether I could appoint one of these clergymen to one of those offices or the other. . . We, as Bishops of the Church of England,

cannot sanction their doctrines or practices, and therefore we call upon them in terms of earnest but affectionate expostulation to retreat from a position which we feel to be so utterly wrong."

The High Church Bishop of Oxford (Dr. Mackarness) declared that he cordially concurred in the resolution, but he added :—" I feel bound to say with respect to some of the persons who are said to be members of this Society, that I do not believe they have the slightest idea of any conspiracy against the doctrine and discipline of our Reformed Church." At the same time his lordship declared that he "disapproved" of the *Priest in Absolution*.

The Bishop of St. Asaph said :—" The system of Confession which we have been discussing, followed by priestly absolution, has no sanction from Scripture or from the formularies of the Church of England. I believe that it is most injurious to those who come to confess, and most detrimental to the Minister who receives Confession. . . . What was the result of the system in Ireland, when assassination was frequent in that country? Did not the assassin go to Confession the previous day and obtain relief to his conscience? And what was the effect on the priest's own mind? Was it likely that he could come in contact with so much sin and contract no defilement? Alas! let the moral aspect of many countries on the continent supply the answer."

The Right Rev. Dr. Moberly, Bishop of Salisbury, who next addressed the House, avowed that he believed Confession to be right, and yet even he condemned in very severe language the *Priest in Absolution*, and the teaching of the Society of the Holy Cross, as contained in its "Books for the Young," No. I., *Confession*. He said :—" I entirely agree with the resolution; but I think that this matter is a much more difficult one than on the surface it appears. I cannot doubt that Confession and Absolution were enjoined by our Lord Himself, and that they form a real part of the

system of the Church, and under certain circumstances are capable of being blessed in the highest possible degree for good to those who partake of them. At the same time, by carrying them to the excess taught and practised by the persons whose conduct is before us to-day they cannot but be productive of great and serious evil. . . . I believe the practice of habitual Confession to be mischievous in the highest degree, and I have a particular object in referring to it, for the greater part of my life, as that of others of your lordships, has been spent as a schoolmaster, and I confess that there is not one thing in all the world which is deeper in my heart and conscience than the corrupting mischief of any such system as this getting into our schools."

The Bishop of Bath and Wells said :—"We have seen how the authors of this book, by the doctrine and practice they have set forth, have scandalized the public mind, and I am sure that if we, the Bishops of the Church of England, were to aid and abet such doctrine and practice, we should lose the respect and confidence of the country. For these reasons, I think it most important that we should unanimously agree to the resolutions before us."

The last speech from which I shall quote was that of the High Church Bishop of Chichester. "I think," he said, "this is a very serious matter, and that it is the duty of this House to protest in the strongest manner against the teaching of these Romanizing doctrines, and the adoption of these Romanizing practices. There is not a single syllable in the Statutes [of the Society of the Holy Cross] about Confession to Almighty God, and seeking forgiveness through Jesus Christ. There is no intimation that the means of forgiveness are open to all who come to God through Christ. Nothing of the sort is said, and this is a case in which omission appears to me to be fatal. It leads the people to lean on the priest. You cannot find that in the Scriptures, and no one would say that it is inculcated in the formularies of our Church."

The resolutions were then put, and carried unanimously.

I have devoted a considerable amount of space to the speeches of the Bishops on this occasion, partly because of their intrinsic value, and also because the book in which alone they are recorded *verbatim* is exceedingly scarce, and is, therefore, quite out of the reach of ordinary Churchmen, who may be glad to have the chief points of the speeches within reach in these pages. It will be observed that the *Priest in Absolution* was thus unanimously condemned by all the Bishops of Canterbury Convocation present on this occasion, and since then not one Bishop of the Church of England has ever publicly said, or written, one word in its favour. Perhaps one of the most damaging exposures of the evil results of the *Ritualistic* Confessional ever made in public, was that made in the Lower House of Canterbury Convocation, on July 4th, 1877, two days only before the debate in the Upper House. The subject of Confession had been sent down to the Lower House, by the Bishops, for discussion, in consequence of the exposure of the *Priest in Absolution* in the House of Lords. In the course of the debate in the Lower House, Archdeacon Allen rose and said:—

“ I find it printed that it is a shame to suspect any of these Clergymen of misusing this mode of treatment of spiritual disease. A shame to suspect them ! If that is said, I must say something on the other side. I was talking to an elderly clergyman—a Rural Dean, older than myself—a man who has daily prayer in his church, and whom all his friends and neighbours respect—a venerable and wise High Churchman, and he told me that in his own experience *he had known three clergymen who had practised this teaching of habitual Confession as a duty, who had fallen into habits of immorality with women who had come to them for guidance.* That was the testimony of an old-fashioned High Churchman ; and I will give his name to any one who asks me for it. You know it is said a discreet Confessor will make a proper use of this book [the *Priest in Absolution*]. A discreet Confessor ! Is it possible that discretion can be a quality of every young clergyman who is a member of this Society, which is said to have a property in this book ? ”<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> *Chronicle of Convocation.* Sessions, July 3-6, 1877, p. 231.

The truth of Archdeacon Allen's charge against these three Ritualistic clergymen does not appear to have been ever challenged, much less refuted. It raises the very serious question, How far is the Ritualistic Confessional used for immoral purposes by wicked and evil-disposed clergymen? No one wishes to make sweeping and general charges on such a subject. But is there not just cause for anxiety? Is not human nature the same in all ages? That the Confessional has been grossly used for immoral purposes, by evil-disposed priests, and that to a gigantic extent in the Church of Rome, is amply proved, beyond the possibility of refutation, by the Bulls of the Popes themselves against solicitant priests. Anyone who wishes for clear and ample evidence on this point, based exclusively upon Roman Catholic authorities, should certainly read *An Historical Sketch of Sacerdotal Celibacy*, by Mr. Henry C. Lea, of Philadelphia. Mr. Lea's book is not sufficiently known in Europe, and I only wonder that an edition of such a learned work has never yet been published in England. He proves conclusively that the Confessional has been used, by wicked priests, for the vilest purposes in the past, and that the offence is not unknown to the nineteenth century. It appears that the Abbé Helsen, who for twenty-five years had been and still was a Roman Catholic preacher in Brussels, addressed an indignant remonstrance to the Archbishop of Mechlin, in 1832, in which he exposed to the light of day the awful immorality existing at that time amongst the Romish priesthood.

"Helsen," writes Mr. Lea, "alludes to the scandals of the Confessional as a cause of its avoidance by the faithful and as contributing powerfully to the growth of religious indifference, and that these scandals exist is not a mere matter of conjecture or inference. If it were so, there would be no need for reiterating the prohibitions against the absolution by Confessors of their fair partners in guilt, which is still occasionally found to be necessary by modern Councils; nor would Pius IX., in 1866, have felt himself obliged to declare that the power granted to Bishops to absolve in cases reserved to the Pope

shall not in future extend to offences reserved for Papal absolution by Benedict XIV.'s Bull '*Sacramentum Pœnitentiæ*.' In fact, the crime of 'solicitation' must have *become notoriously frequent* before the Congregation of the Inquisition at Rome could have felt impelled, in 1867, to put forth an Instruction addressed to all Archbishops, Bishops, and Ordinaries, complaining that the Constitutions on the subject did not receive proper attention, and that in some places abuses had crept in, both as to requiring penitents to denounce guilty Confessors, and as to the punishing of Confessors guilty of solicitation [*i.e.*, soliciting women, while in the Confessional, to immorality]. It therefore urged the officials everywhere to greater vigour in investigating such offences, and gave a summary of the practice of the Inquisition in regard to these matters."<sup>19</sup>

Bearing these and other similar facts in mind, I am not at all surprised to learn, on the reliable authority of Archdeacon Allen, that within the experience of even *one* clergyman "*three*" instances were made known in which the Ritualistic Confessional has been used by Father Confessors for the vilest purposes. Are we to suppose that those three were the only guilty persons in England? If the experience of others could only be made public, is there not reason to fear that the instances would be considerably multiplied? Has not, at least, one clergyman, since 1877, been deprived of his living for the crime of seducing a young lady through the Confessional? Clerical celibacy is rapidly spreading amongst the Ritualists, and it is not at all a pleasant thought that our wives, daughters, and sisters may be going to Confession to some young bachelor priest, and talking with him on subjects which should never be alluded to. This sort of thing is bad enough when the Confessor happens to be a married man, but when he is a celibate the dangers are greatly increased. Let it not be said that I am bringing reckless and wholesale charges against the Ritualistic clergy. I am doing nothing of the kind. I am simply dealing with facts, and with possibilities, which we

<sup>19</sup> *Lea's History of Sacerdotal Celibacy*, p. 633. Second edition. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1884.

cannot afford to ignore. That the Confessional may be used for the vilest purposes is acknowledged even by the author of the *Priest in Absolution*, who, as a Ritualistic Confessor of many years' experience, speaks with some authority on this point. While writing on the care which the Confessor should exercise in hearing the Confessions of females, he remarks:—

“Nothing more shows the fearfulness of Satanic devices than that it is possible that a Sacrament which was instituted to drive forth from souls sin and the devil, and make them living temples of the Holy Ghost, may be profaned by abusers of its ministrations to the grossest iniquity.”<sup>20</sup>

This testimony of the Editor of the *Priest in Absolution* is corroborated by that of Dr. Pusey, given after he had himself been hearing Confessions for forty years. He tells us of one way in which the Confessional is still abused by Confessors:—

“It is a sad sight,” writes Dr. Pusey, “to see Confessors giving their whole morning to young women devotees, while they dismiss men or married women, who have, perhaps, left their household affairs with difficulty to find themselves rejected with, ‘I am busy, go to someone else!’ so that, perhaps, such people will go on for months or years without the Sacraments. This is not hearing Confessions for God’s sake, but for one’s own.”<sup>21</sup>

Again, Dr. Pusey warns the Confessor, when in the Confessional,—

“You may pervert this Sacrament [of Penance] from its legitimate end, which is to kindle an exceeding horror of sin in the minds of others, into a subtle means of feeding evil passions and sin in your own mind.”<sup>22</sup>

He also warns the Confessor, who hears Confessions while “in a state of mortal sin,” which does not necessarily imply what the world would term a *wickedness*:—

“If the ministry of a Confessor is beset with dangers, even for a

<sup>20</sup> *The Priest in Absolution*, Part II., p. 77.

<sup>21</sup> *Pusey’s Manual for Confessors*, p. 108.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102.

good man, how can one in your condition hope to escape? There is but too great danger, that you will add fresh crimes to your account by an undue indulgence to faults in others which you have not overcome in yourself; or, worst of all, being the cause of temptation to others, thereby proving yourself no spiritual father, but rather a ravening wolf; no Minister of God, but of the devil; no physician, but the murderer of souls."<sup>23</sup>

And yet one more quotation from Dr. Pusey which, with all my heart and soul, I believe to be the solemn truth:—

“Be assured,” he writes, “that this is one of the gravest faults of *our day* in the administration of the Sacrament of Penance, that it is the road by which a number of Christians go down to hell.”<sup>24</sup>

When the Editor of the *Priest in Absolution*, and the Rev. Dr. Pusey, both experienced Father Confessors themselves, make such startling acknowledgments as those I have just quoted, is it surprising or unreasonable that Protestant Churchmen also should raise a loud note of warning, and urge people on no account to enter on that road, by which “a number of Christians go down to hell”? It cannot be Christ’s road, for he who walks on *that* road, cannot possibly go astray. Such dire possibilities as those so frankly acknowledged by these two noted Ritualistic leaders, can never result from that Confession to the Great High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ, practised by all devout Protestant Christians. The Father Confessor, as Dr. Pusey admits, is often, while in the Confessional, the “murderer of souls.”

And now let us return once more to the Society of the Holy Cross and its proceedings, in relation to the *Priest in Absolution*. The ordinary Monthly Chapter of the Society was held on July 10th, 1877, when an address of sympathy with the Society was read from the so-called “Church of England Working Men’s Society.” The Rev. G. D. Nicholas rose and complained that the caution given to the brethren by the Master at the Special Chapter, as to the

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 315.

“strictly confidential” nature of its proceedings, had been ignored. A lady had actually “told him, on the following morning, that she knew that the vote of the Society was not unanimous.” Next a letter was read from Brother Oxenham, who was evidently anxious to keep his promise to the Archbishop of Canterbury. That gentleman enclosed a motion which he wished to bring before the September Synod, if approved by the Chapter. The motion was as follows :—

“That inasmuch as certain parts of the *Priest in Absolution*, relating to the questioning of penitents, are, in the opinion of this Synod, at least very liable to injurious misuse, this Synod resolves that all copies of the said book now in the possession of the Society shall be destroyed.”<sup>25</sup>

To tolerate the discussion of such a very proper motion as this was what the brethren could never assent to. The very thought was treason. So, in pious horror, the Rev. Robert James Wilson exclaimed that “he hoped that the Chapter would not allow Brother Oxenham’s motion to be placed on the Agenda” of the September Synod. So to make quite sure that the hated and dreaded discussion should not take place, Brother Wilson proposed, and the Rev. Edgar Hoskins (now Rector of St. Martin’s, Ludgate, London) seconded the following resolution :—“That the Society thinks it undesirable to enter at the Synod into a reconsideration of its relations to the *Priest in Absolution*.”<sup>26</sup> There was no difference of opinion in the Chapter as to the desirability of stifling discussion on Brother Oxenham’s motion, and accordingly Brother Wilson’s resolution was “carried unanimously.” And yet, notwithstanding this decision of the July Chapter, when the September Synod was held the relations of the Society to the *Priest in Absolution* were very fully considered, as the official report of the proceedings fully shows, though, of course, Brother Oxenham’s motion was rigorously boycotted.

<sup>25</sup> S. S. C. *July Chapter*, 1877, p. 2.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

One of the special subjects discussed at the July Chapter was "Our Action Towards the Bishops." It was introduced by the Rev. C. F. Lowder, who, after mentioning that the Upper House of Convocation had appointed a Committee to consider the Statutes of the Society of the Holy Cross and the *Priest in Absolution*, proceeded to congratulate the Society on having so far escaped Episcopal censure. That, it seems, was largely due to the Bishop of Oxford, who, while denouncing the Society and its Confessional Book in public, was at the same time secretly plotting for the purpose of shielding them from the expected censure of the Episcopal Bench. In the course of his speech Brother Lowder said that "Putting aside the rhodomontade and *ad captandum* words of the Archbishop about a 'conspiracy,' he saw grounds for hope in the line taken by the Bishop of Oxford, who, he believed, was friendly to us, and had moved for a Committee in order to save the censure which was hanging over us. That censure would be most serious to the Society at large, and especially to the younger brethren, and those holding positions under Government. He advised that a deputation of the Society should go before the Committee [of Bishops] with the object of explaining and defending the Statutes." Brother Lowder concluded his speech by moving a resolution to the effect that the Master in Council take such steps as might seem best to explain the work of the Society to the Committee of the Upper House of Convocation. This resolution was severely criticised by several of the brethren. In particular, Brother A. H. Mackonochie declared that he differed entirely from the course proposed. "The leading mind among the Bishops was," he said, "simply hatred to the Society as far as they knew it. . . At the meeting at Lambeth the Archbishop had surreptitiously got the Statutes out of the Master, and having obtained them the Archbishop of York announced that he should not feel himself bound to respect the confidence of the Society. The Bishops' object was to put down the

Society, which they hate and fear. They have already a great idea of its power."

Canon T. T. Carter said he "must agree with Brother Mackonochie as to the evident animus of the Bishops. They would destroy us if they could, and the principles we uphold. . . There were Bishops, he knew, who hated the way in which they were kept under by the Archbishop, and only wanted to be backed up; and our power against the Archbishop lay in those men being able to show our position. . . Now that we have gone so far, we must not withdraw from the course we have taken."

The Rev. T. Outram Marshall (Organizing Secretary of the English Church Union) said he could support Brother Lowder's motion, if the powers of the deputation were limited. "He looked upon it as an opportunity to teach the Gospel to those who seldom hear us." This will no doubt be news to many. It was certainly impertinent on Mr. Marshall's part thus to imply that the Bishops seldom heard the Gospel, and that it was the duty of a secret Society of Father Confessors to "teach" it to them!

The Rev. Robert Eyton (now Canon of Westminster) declared that "He was glad of unburdening his mind, and stating what might have to be his course of action. There was a great tide of feeling in the country setting in towards Catholicism as the only safe ground. He hoped the Society would not by its policy at this great crisis check that tide. If it ever came to his having to choose between remaining in the Society, and ceasing to minister in the Church of England, he felt no doubt what he should do, deeply as he should regret his severance from S. S. C." It may help towards explaining Mr. Eyton's position if I mention that he at that time held a curate's license under the Bishop of London, and therefore what he meant was that rather than lose that license he would, though with deep "regret," leave the Society of the Holy Cross. As a matter of fact, he has since withdrawn from the Society, though whether his heart

is still with it or not, now that he is a Residentiary Canon of Westminster, is more than I can say. Certainly, so far as I can ascertain, Canon Eyton has never *publicly* denounced the Society of the Holy Cross, and he must at one time have been anxious that his connection with it during seven years should be unknown to the general public.

The Rev. Nathaniel Dawes (now Bishop of Rockhampton, Australia) supported the motion. He said:—"Our weakness hitherto had been our 'secrecy.' He deprecated a spirit of uncourteous defiance towards the Bishops. . . . There is no need to go to the Bishops as penitents, but we must not forget our obligations to them." From this I gather that, in the opinion of Brother Dawes the Society of the Holy Cross had done nothing for which they needed to express sorrow.

One of the speakers, the Rev. Edmund Gough de Wood, Vicar of St. Clement's, Cambridge, is evidently of a subtle turn of mind. After declaring that if the Society went to the Bishops, without being first invited, it would be like "rushing into the lion's mouth," he recommended the Society to revise its Statutes. "Our Statutes," he said, "were not drawn up for the public. The Society used to be a secret Society. If now it becomes a public one it might be wise to alter them; perhaps to have certain Constitutions *for outsiders to see*, and an '*Interior Rule*' *for ourselves*." Some persons would term a proposition, such as this, thoroughly Jesuitical. Eventually the Chapter passed Brother Lowder's motion, but with the proviso that the Master should not go before the Committee of the Upper House, unless "summoned by them."

A short discussion followed on the "Resignations of Brethren." The Rev. Joseph Newton Smith (Founder of the Society of the Holy Cross) made a speech, in the course of which he displayed considerable hatred of publicity. He "thought we ought to cultivate 'the wisdom of the serpent.' He did not share the admiration some brothers had

expressed for English honesty and straightforwardness. He thought our secrecy had been a protection to us, and he therefore was opposed to surrendering the Roll to the Bishops."

Before the Chapter closed protests were made by two of the brethren. The Rev. E. G. de Salis Wood said that he "wished to protest against the statement in the Address [of the Society of the Holy Cross] to Convocation, that 'the Church of England teaches that Confession is not a matter of compulsory obligation.'" The Rev. A. H. Mackonochie declared that "he agreed with Brother Wood in this sense, that for those who are in mortal sin there is no way generally of obtaining pardon, save in the Sacrament of Penance."

Two days before this Chapter was held the Rev. W. J. Knox-Little (now Canon Knox-Little) preached (on July 8th) a sermon on the subject of the *Priest in Absolution* to his own congregation at St. Alban's Church, Manchester, and subsequently he published it in pamphlet form. I refer to it here as illustrating the tactics of some leading Ritualists. The preacher had not the courage to tell his people plainly that he was himself a member of the Society of the Holy Cross, yet to save his conscience he thus referred to the matter:—

"My connection, indeed, with the Society of the Holy Cross is of the *slightest*, but my knowledge of the good and holy men who are leading members of it is intimate, and I believe, from all I *have heard* of it, that the Society of the Holy Cross is a *noble Society*, no matter what calumny may be heaped upon it."<sup>27</sup>

Was this a strictly accurate way for Canon Knox-Little to describe his connection with the Society of the Holy Cross? Was it right to say that his "connection" with it was "of the slightest," when he was a full member at the

<sup>27</sup> *The Priest in Absolution*, by Rev. W. J. Knox-Little, M.A., p. 26. London: Rivingtons.

very moment he was speaking? And notice the expression, "from all that I have *heard* of it"; as though he had no *personal* knowledge of its dark history and Popish Statutes! It may reasonably be asked here, If the S. S. C. "is a *noble* Society," why did Canon Knox-Little sever his connection with it the next year?

At the August, 1877, Chapter of the Society of the Holy Cross, a letter was read from the Master of the Society "to the effect that, as some of the brethren had expressed their disapproval of his action in surrendering the Statutes to the Archbishop, he thought it would be well to give an opportunity at the [September] Synod for an expression of opinion on the part of the Society as to his conduct." On the motion of the Rev. Anthony Bathe, now Vicar of Fridaythorpe, York, a resolution assuring the Master that he possessed "the full confidence of the Society" was carried unanimously. The Rev. Charles Stebbing Wallace (now Vicar of the Church of the Ascension, Lavender Hill, S.W.) brought before the Chapter the difficult circumstances in which he was placed. He said, "that the Archbishop of Canterbury had refused to license him to the Curacy of St. Barnabas', Beckenham, because he would not leave S. S. C." On the motion of the Rev. H. D. Nihill, seconded by the Rev. Anthony Bathe, a resolution was passed by the Chapter unanimously thanking Brother Wallace for his courageous conduct. At this Chapter, it may interest some to know, the late Archdeacon Denison was admitted into the Order of Probationers. The Archdeacon made no secret of his connection with the Society of the Holy Cross. In his *Notes of My Life*, he glories in the fact that he joined it because of the attack on it in 1877.

The September, 1877, Synod of the Society of the Holy Cross was looked forward to by the brethren with more than ordinary interest and anxiety. It was the first Synod of the whole Society held since Lord Redesdale's exposure of the *Priest in Absolution*. I am sorry to state that the

Sermon to the brethren, and the Master's Address to the Synod on this important occasion have not come into my possession. But I do possess the official and secret report of the Synod itself, which was held in St. Peter's Church, London Docks, on September 13th and 14th. The proceedings began each day at the early hour of 9 A.M. and lasted until 7 P.M.<sup>38</sup> At this Synod an effort was made by several of the brethren to nominally break up the Society, but to continue it under another name, so as to avoid the official censure of Convocation. The truly Jesuitical scheme seems to have been suddenly sprung on the Society, for Brother Mackonochie denied that the Synod had the power to discuss the question "after twenty-four hours' notice." It was said that "very many" of the brethren had received no notice of what was coming on. A series of resolutions bearing on the subject had been prepared. It was, however, soon evident that there would be a strong opposition to the proposals for disbanding the Society, and a protest was entered against the discussion of the question at that Synod. After an excited debate, it was decided that the Resolutions should be brought forward as an amendment to the first motion on the agenda paper. That motion was the result of the recent discussion in public of the *Priest in Absolution*. A desire was expressed at the Synod that the Statutes might be revised, with a view to toning down some of the expressions in the Statutes of the Society, not that anyone objected to the *doctrine* contained in those Statutes, but to the use of *terms*, such as "The Mass," and "Sacrament of Penance," &c., which had given offence to the Bishops. Accordingly, the Rev. William Henry Hutchings (now Archdeacon of Cleveland) proposed, and the Rev. Edgar Hoskins seconded, the following motion:—

"That in the opinion of this Synod it is advisable that a Committee be appointed to consider the form of the Society's Statutes, with a view to modification or otherwise."

<sup>38</sup> Charles Lowder: *a Biography*, p. 311. First edition.

In proposing this motion, Brother Hutchings said that :—  
 “It was the opinion of a well-known Oxford Professor<sup>29</sup> that to dissolve would be to create confusion in certain minds, and would involve some loss of self-respect; if we dissolved we acknowledged ourselves to be in the wrong, and destroyed the great instrument we had for promoting the Catholic Revival in this country. . . . To appoint a Committee to consider the form of the Statutes would be to withdraw the Statutes as they now stand, and so prevent the Bishops from considering them.” This was a clever scheme, and proves to my mind that the motion of Brother Hutchings was mainly intended to “draw a red herring” across the trail of the Bishops.

The Rev. Edgar Hoskins, now Rector of St. Martin's, Ludgate Hill, London, in seconding the motion, “thought it would be very disastrous for the Society to disband. What we have to stand up for is Eucharistic Truth, and freedom of Confession in the Church of England.”

The Rev. William Purton declared that, in his opinion, S. S. C. “was one of the outposts which we were bound to defend; he thought it would be cowardly to disband.”

The Rev. W. J. Knox-Little (now Canon Knox-Little) “maintained that we must do what was right, and leave the result to God. Losing self-respect! A dread of what would be said! Fear of the laity! All this must be put out of the question. He was opposed to the mere withdrawal of terms;<sup>30</sup> that, he believed, would be inadequate to meet the difficulty. Did the Synod (he asked) believe in the certainty of a Synodical condemnation? Did we realize the force of such condemnation? It would be impossible to remain in the Society after such a condemnation. What was S. S. C. that Catholic work should be given up for it? To revise

<sup>29</sup> Who was this “well-known Oxford Professor”? I am inclined to think he was Dr. Pusey, who had evidently been consulted by the Society, for at this Synod a letter was read from him on the question of revising the Statutes.

<sup>30</sup> That is, to such “terms” as the “Mass,” &c., in the Statutes.

the Statutes by the withdrawal of terms would not be to avert a Synodical condemnation. He would support the resolutions in favour of disbanding."

These were brave words, coming from one who soon after withdrew from the Society, without waiting for any "Synodical condemnation." I have altered the wording of his speech, in accordance with his own corrections, as given in the *October Chapter*, p. 1.

At this point, Brother E. G. de Salis Wood obtained permission to bring forward his resolutions, as an amendment to the motion of Brother Hutchings. They are somewhat lengthy, but I think it may be useful to quote them here in full, omitting only the last two clauses, as not of any importance. They reveal a plan for disbanding the Society, so far as the public knowledge of their proceedings went, while at the same time providing for its continuance under another name, by which scheme the general public would be led to suppose that it had ceased to exist altogether. The following were the resolutions (the italics are mine):—

I. That on and after the 15th day of September, 1877, the Society of the Holy Cross be disbanded, and that all its members be and they are hereby freed from all obligations imposed by the Society in respect to its Statutes, Laws, or Rules of Life (*save and except the obligation of confidence as regards past proceedings of Synods and Chapters and of this Synod*), as well as from any formal bond of union or mutual obligations at present subsisting in virtue of Membership in the Society."

"II. (a.) That the Master, the Secretaries, the Treasurer, and two other Brethren chosen by them, shall be and are hereby constituted Trustees of the funds, papers, and other property of the Society, without power of disposition except as hereinafter provided.

"(b.) That it be and is suggested to the said Trustees, that from time to time, at their discretion, *they should invite to informal conference all whose names shall have been upon the Roll of the Society on the 14th September, 1877, as well as such other priests as they may choose.*<sup>31</sup>

<sup>31</sup> This was a plan for continuing the S. S. C. in existence under another name, together with power to add to their number. There was a great deal of subtlety in such a plan, which is more clearly developed in the next section.

“(c.) That the Trustees shall have power to transfer the property of the Society to any other Society with similar objects and like constitution, which at any future time may be formed, if they shall receive the sanction expressed by a vote of the majority of those present and voting at such a Conference as is provided for in the foregoing section; at least one month’s notice having been given to all whose names were on the said 14th day of September on the Roll of the Society of the Holy Cross.”

In moving this resolution as an amendment the Rev. E. G. Wood said that “the Society had been rushed down hill into the midst of its foes, and was now surrounded, and in danger of being cut to pieces. There was nothing for it but to ‘take open order,’ to skirmish as it were for a time, to pass through our enemies *and re-form in a stronger position*. In other words, he counselled disbanding the Society, *with the view of thereby escaping an Episcopal censure*, and of reconstructing the Society under the same or a similar title, at as early a date as possible. This it was well known was the opinion of at least one Bishop who was friendly towards us.<sup>39</sup> . . . The course he (Mr. Wood) advocated derived great support from consideration of the policy of the Apostolic See, when the Jesuit Order was suppressed by Clement XIV.—not because it had done wrong, but simply, as the Pope emphatically asserted, for the sake of the peace of the Church. And that was the ground on which he (the speaker) urged the disbanding of the S. S. C. . . . The Society, as appeared from the list of resignations the Master had read out, was rapidly bleeding to death.”

In thus comparing the Jesuits with the Society of the Holy Cross, Mr. Wood certainly used a most appropriate illustration. It is, however, a great pity that the authorities of the Church of England did not suppress the S. S. C., as Pope Clement XIV. did the Jesuit Order. Mr. Wood’s amendment did not find favour with a section of the

<sup>39</sup> It would be interesting to know who the Bishop was, who thus played a double part, censuring the Society in public, and helping it on with a friendly lift in secret!

brethren in Synod, for no sooner had he concluded his speech than several of them raised the question, was the amendment in order? The Master of the Society definitely ruled that it was; but that did not satisfy the discontented brethren, who actually had the daring to challenge the Master's ruling. The Rev. H. D. Nihill moved, and the Rev. T. Outram Marshall seconded the following motion:— "That the ruling given by the Master was not correct." Of course, this was equivalent to a vote of censure, and an excited debate followed, in which Bishop Jenner took part. Eventually the Master triumphed, for only thirty-six voted for the resolution, while fifty-three voted against it. Mr. Wood's amendment was thereupon once more declared in order, and the general debate was continued.

Canon George Body (now Canon Missioner of Durham) "spoke strongly in favour of disbanding. He gave his reasons for having remained in S. S. C. under its altered circumstances. The Rule was a help to him. He desired to fight shoulder to shoulder with those who were fighting the same battle; but now he thought that the work of the Society could not be continued without great injury to the Church."

The Rev. C. D. Goldie moved another amendment to the effect that the Society should assure the Bishops that the Council would "be anxious" to "consider any recommendation which may be made by their lordships, and to coincide with any amendments which are in accordance with the teaching of the early Church, and the Formularies of our Church."

The Rev. Frederick William Puller (now head of the Cowley Fathers) supported Brother Goldie's amendment. He said that he was against disbanding, but "he admitted that it was possible that the wording of the Statutes might be improved, and he allowed the force of the arguments that they had been drafted under the idea that they would be seen only by those who would understand them."

The Rev. William H. Colbeck Luke affirmed that he "would shelve the question of disbanding for the present."

The Rev. A. H. Mackonochie declared that "for his own part (and many had expressed their agreement with him) he did not mean to be disbanded, but would hold on, with any who chose to join him, as the S. S. C., in spite of any vote for disbanding."

The Rev. T. Outram Marshall, spoke against disbanding, and then went on to make a very startling announcement. He declared that, "There were *five or six Bishops who wished us well, and who would be glad to do all in their power to prevent the Upper House of Convocation from condemning the Society.*"<sup>38</sup> Mr. Marshall proceeded, with an astuteness which would have done credit to the General of the Jesuits, to point out that, "They would be able to lay great stress on the fact that the *Statutes were under consideration*; they [the 'five or six Bishops'] *wanted to stand by us*, and we should thus enable them to do so. If the Archbishop of Canterbury found that the Bishops were *divided*, he would probably shrink from pressing the matter; and so this storm, like many others, would pass away."

In this Mr. Marshall was a true prophet. The Statutes *were* revised; but rejected by the Society afterwards; the Archbishop did not press the matter; the storm passed away, and the Society went on its way rejoicing, mainly, I have no doubt, through the treachery of these five or six Bishops.

The Rev. Arthur Hawkins Ward, Vicar of St. Raphael, Bristol, informed the Synod that "he had come most reluctantly to the conclusion that we must, *for a time*, disband. Unless we did so the censure of the entire Episcopate would come upon us."

Archdeacon Denison spoke next. He asked, "What

<sup>38</sup> What hypocrites these "five or six Bishops" must have been! They succeeded in their underhand proceedings, for the dreaded censure of the Upper House did not take place.

advantage could there be in disbanding? We should part with some of the most precious things we possessed, and should gain nothing. He had turned towards that Society, believing that the brethren, at any rate, would stand firm. As to a Synodical condemnation, he laughed at it! On the vote of this Synod, he believed, hung the hope of the Catholic Church of England. We had heard very much about Episcopal condemnation, but such a condemnation would be based upon Protestant principles. Our attitude should be, 'You shall kill me, if you choose, but you shall not stop me.'"

After some further discussion, Brother Goldie withdrew his amendment. Brother Wood's amendment for disbanding was then put, and was lost by a great majority, only nine voting for it, and sixty-seven against it. At last Brother Hutchings's original motion, in favour of a Committee to revise the Statutes, was put to the Synod, and was carried, forty-one voting for it, and twenty against it.

On the second day of the Synod an important debate took place on the *Priest in Absolution*. The Rev. Orby Shipley (who is now a Roman Catholic) opened the discussion by moving the following very startling resolution:—

"That, in consequence of the evil effects which have ensued from the private circulation of the *Priest in Absolution*, the bad use made of its contents, and the false charges founded upon garbled quotations, it is due both to the memory of its compiler, and to the character of its owners, that the work be published in the ordinary course of trade, and this Synod hereby authorises the same."

Of course this resolution was equivalent to flinging defiance at the Bishops, and at all the opponents of that filthy book. Brother Shipley "declared, emphatically, that the book was *pure and holy*. Publicity, he held, was now the only safeguard for our personal character against the evil which had been done by its private circulation. . . He protested against the action of those brethren who had publicly condemned the book, which they admitted they had never read."

The Rev. H. D. Nihill seconded the resolution, and said that "the most miserable circumstance about the question was the condemnation of the book by those who had not read it."

The Rev. W. C. Macfarlane moved and Brother Goldie seconded as an amendment—"That all the words, after 'That' be omitted, in order to insert the following 'inasmuch as the book called the *Priest in Absolution* has been withdrawn from circulation, the copies in possession of the Society be at the disposal of the Master.'"

The Rev. Joseph Newton Smith "opposed the publication of the book; he could not see how we should mend matters by increasing the opportunities of unprincipled people to sin by sowing the book broadcast."

What an acknowledgment this was, to be made by no less a person than the Founder of the Society of the Holy Cross! A more severe, though, apparently, unintentional, condemnation of the *Priest in Absolution*, could not have been passed by any Protestant Churchman. To circulate the book publicly would, in his estimation, "increase the opportunities" of committing sin in the world, and thus do the work of Satan more effectually. Those whose painful duty it has been to read its dirty pages, as I have, will quite agree with Brother Newton Smith, who does not, however, appear to have condemned the book itself. If the book would have had such an evil effect on the general public, is there not reason to fear that it may have already had an evil effect on some of the young bachelor Father Confessors who have already studied it, and who are made of the same flesh and blood as other mortals?

The Rev. W. J. Knox-Little delivered a speech on the subject, which I report as corrected by himself later on in the report of the October, 1877, Chapter of the Society. He said that "circumstances had compelled him to speak of the book in public. He had not seen the book, and therefore he acted upon the descriptions of it which he had seen and heard, by those able to speak accurately on the subject. He

defended the general principle of the book, but deprecated the extracts, of which an unwarrantable use had been made. At the same time he acknowledged his disapproval of it as a work on moral theology, and he by no means repented of what he had said. With regard to the motion he argued that it would be hardly honourable to publish the book in the face of Convocation."

The Rev. A. H. Mackonochie "thought the book a most useful one for young priests, and expressed a hope that it might be circulated again at some future time." He supported the motion.

The Rev. Charles Parnell, Curate of St. Bartholomew, Brighton, "opposed the publication of the book"; and the Rev. Charles Stebbing Wallace "urged that, as men of honour, we had no right to publish the book."

The Master, in reply to a question, explained that "the amendment meant that the book should be destroyed *privately*, without casting any stigma upon the author. He maintained that, as honourable men, we could never put the book out again."

The Rev. T. Outram Marshall "opposed both the destruction and the publication of the book."

The Rev. R. Rhodes Bristow supported the amendment. "If the book were published, it would be prosecuted, he said, as an obscene book. We did not want the book. Dr. Pusey was bringing out a work on Moral Theology. He would therefore instruct the Master to deal with the book as with waste paper."

The book of Dr. Pusey, referred to by Mr. Bristow, was in reality only another adapted translation of the same book from which the *Priest in Absolution* was translated, namely, the Abbé Gaume's *Manual for Confessors*. Dr. Pusey's translation was published early in 1878.

At last the debate ended. The question was then put, "That the words proposed to be left out stand part of the question." This was carried by thirty-four to eight. The

amendment was therefore lost. The original motion was then put. Twelve voted for it, and thirty-one against; and therefore it was lost.

The Society would neither publish nor destroy the book. I learn from the official report of this Synod that the Society received several messages of sympathy with the brethren for what they had suffered under the attack upon them for their connection with the *Priest in Absolution*. One message was from the "Church of England Working Men's Society"; another from the Bristol Branch of the English Church Union; and a similar one from the Penrith Branch of the Union; and two other resolutions of sympathy were received from the London Province of the Guild of St. Alban's and the Wolverhampton Branch of the same Guild. Several other branches of the English Church Union sent, later on, similar resolutions. At the October Chapter, a letter was read from the Rev. Richard Whitehead Hoare, Vicar of St. Michael's, Croydon, "enclosing a letter expressing the sympathy and goodwill which the Bishop of Grahamstown felt towards S. S. C."<sup>84</sup>

The action of this Synod led, eventually, to the resignation of the Master of the Society (the Rev. F. L. Bagshawe). At the October Chapter a long letter was read from him, in which he complained bitterly of the way in which he had been treated by the Society. His first thought had been, he said, to resign at once, immediately after the Synod, on the ground that his policy had been "distinctly negatived" by the Synod. "I asked leave," he wrote, "to destroy privately the copies of the *Priest in Absolution*, on the ground that we were bound in honour never to circulate that book again"; but the Synod refused to grant his request. He would not, however, resign at that time, lest it should hinder the success of the efforts being made to revise the Statutes "Negotiations of a private kind," he added, "have been already opened with several Bishops; but if these fail, either on

<sup>84</sup> S. S. C. October Chapter, 1877, p. 2.

your part or on theirs, and the work of the Committee is rendered fruitless, I have but one course open to me"—that is to ask them "to elect another Master who can carry out the policy of resistance" to the Bishops.

A letter such as this must indeed have been a bombshell in the Society, and have added greatly to the difficulties of its position. Before the Chapter concluded its sittings it passed unanimously a resolution expressing their "continued and complete confidence" in the Master, and a hope that he would not resign.

Several months passed by without anything being definitely done by the Society of the Holy Cross with regard to their Confessional book. But meanwhile the Committee appointed to revise the Statutes of the Society were hard at work. The Committee consisted of the following seventeen members, all of whom signed its report, presented to the May, 1878, Synod:—The Revs. F. Ll. Bagshawe (the Master), C. F. Lowder, John Andrews Foote, Edgar Hoskins, T. T. Carter (of Clewer), G. R. Prynne (Vicar of St. Peter's, Plymouth), Henry Edward Willington, William Henry Hutchings, L. Alison, R. Rhodes Bristow, J. W. Chadwick, Charles Bodington (now Canon of Lichfield), R. J. Wilson, Charles D. Goldie, Frederick William Puller, R. H. Parry, and George Body. At the April, 1878, Chapter of the Society, it was announced that the Committee of Revision had "communicated the Report (*without any signature of Members attached*)<sup>35</sup> to the following Bishops—London, Winchester, Oxford, Ely, Lichfield, Peterborough, Exeter, and Chichester, *but that no copies of the Report have been supplied to the two Archbishops.*"<sup>36</sup> This significant omission of the Archbishops, shows that the Committee were either afraid of their knowing too much of their proceedings, or was an intentional insult to their Graces. Perhaps it was both.

<sup>35</sup> This shows how afraid they were to be known to the Bishops. Their Report, as presented to the May, 1878, Synod, does contain all the names of the Members of the Committee mentioned above.

<sup>36</sup> *S. S. C. April Chapter, 1878, p. 3.* For a complete list of the Members of this secret Society up to the year 1897, see *Church Association Tract, No. 244*, price one penny.

And why, it may be asked, was not the Report sent to *all* the Bishops of the southern and northern provinces? Those in the north were left out altogether, while only eight Bishops in the southern province, out of twenty-two, received a copy of the document. I can only account for the omission by the dread of publicity and the light of day, which has ever characterised the owl-like proceedings of the Society of the Holy Cross.

When the May, 1878, Synod of the S. S. C. met, the Master's address was entirely taken up with the recent attack on the Society, and the revision of its Statutes. He mentioned that in 1877, the Society numbered exactly three hundred members, but that during the past year their had been no fewer than 122 resignations. He found, however, one consolation in the fact that the Society had "been honoured by the addition to its ranks of one of the most distinguished members of the Church of England, the Ven. Archdeacon Denison."<sup>57</sup> It is evident that the Master had a higher personal sense of honourable conduct than the Society as a whole possessed. He said, in the course of his address:—

"I pass on to another question that will be brought before you, simply because it involves what is personal to me. At a Special Chapter of the Society last year a printed letter was drawn up and sent to the Bishops, in which it was promised that the *Priest in Absolution* should not be circulated. The language was somewhat ambiguous. I thought I understood it, and assured the Archbishop and others that the book was absolutely and for ever withdrawn. Last September Synod I discovered that some brethren looked forward to its *re-circulation* at some future time. Hitherto the book has been in my care—now it will cease to be so. If the Society resolves to preserve the book it must be with a motive, and how that motive can be reconciled with my personal representation to the Bishops will be a difficult question for my own after-consideration."<sup>58</sup>

The sermon to the brethren at this Synod was preached

<sup>57</sup> S. S. C. *Master's Address*, May Synod, 1878, p. 7.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 5, 6.

by the Rev. Canon Carter, of Clewer, but as I do not possess a copy I am unable to quote it here. The *Report of Committee appointed to consider the form of the Society's Statutes*, I fortunately possess. The suggested alterations were twenty-six in number, and mainly consisted of the omission of the words "Mass," "Sacrament of Penance," and "Sacramental Confession" from the Statutes and Office Books of the Society. The report shows that four members of the Committee, not included in the list given above, refused to sign the report. The Rev. John Comper, Rector of St. Margaret's, Aberdeen, it is stated, was "opposed to such suggested alterations as would involve the removal of the terms 'Mass' and 'Sacrament of Penance' from the Statutes and Rules of the Society." The Revs. A. H. Mackonochie, H. D. Nihill, and J. W. Biscoe, were "opposed to *all* the alterations suggested."<sup>39</sup>

Now, although this Committee were quite willing to delete the *terms* "Mass" and "Sacrament of Penance" from the documents of the Society, it is quite clear from their report that they saw no harm in them, and therefore they retained the *things* represented by these *terms*, while rejecting the *names* for politic reasons. As to the term "Mass," they declared that it "can be most legitimately used by English Churchmen at the present day, so only that scandal to the ignorant be avoided."<sup>40</sup> They also justified the use of the term "Sacramental Confession";<sup>41</sup> and, as to the other expression they affirm that "the members of S. S. C. were in no way going beyond what the Church of England permits, when they spoke in their Statutes of the 'Sacrament of Penance,' that sacred rite which seals and completes the work of penitence for post-baptismal deadly sin."<sup>42</sup> It is, therefore, quite certain that this precious Report in reality withdrew nothing but empty names, and was primarily intended for the purpose of throwing more dust in the eyes

<sup>39</sup> *Report of Committee*, p. 16.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

of the Bishops. It was worthy of a conclave of Jesuits rather than of a committee of clergymen within the Reformed Church of England.

At the commencement of the Synod letters were read from Archdeacon Denison, and the Revs. Robert Herbert Godwin (of St. Cyprian's Theological College, Bloemfontein), G. P. Grantham, and William Webster (subsequently Dean of Aberdeen) "deprecating the suggested changes in the Statutes," and from the Revs. George Croke Robinson and Arthur Gordon Stallard ("suggesting amendments to certain of the proposed changes"); and from Charles John Corfe (now Bishop of Corea), who "advocated the suggested changes."

The Master rose to propose the following motion:—"That the Report of the Committee appointed to consider the Society's Statutes be received and adopted"; and was about to speak to it, when the Rev. T. Outram Marshall rose and declared that, in *his* opinion the motion was out of order. Of course this raised a discussion at once. The Master ruled that his own motion was "strictly in order"; but this did not satisfy the rebellious Organizing Secretary of the English Church Union (Mr. Marshall), who at once moved "That the ruling given by the Master is not correct." He found a seconder in the Rev. Lyndhurst Burton Towne, but the Master refused to put the rebel motion to the Synod, whereupon the discontented brethren had to "eat humble pie," and sit down.

The Master then delivered the speech he had prepared in support of his own motion.

The Rev. R. Rhodes Bristow seconded the Master's motion, and announced that "The Committee, while convinced that the Statutes contained nothing but sound doctrine, had sought the peace and unity of the Society by suggesting the changes in our terminology. . . Some might say that we were drawing back, but it was in order that we might strike a harder blow."

The Rev. A. H. Mackonochie complained of one of the

brethren, whose name does not appear to have been mentioned. "He asserted that the Society had been betrayed by one brother, who left the Society as soon as he got it into difficulties."

The Rev. John Edwards (now the Rev. J. Baghot De La Bere, Vicar of St. Mary, Buxted) "advocated the use of the terminology in the Statutes. The term 'Sacrament of Penance,' he maintained, was not only theologically correct, but expressed the intercourse which existed between a priest and a penitent."

The Rev. John William Kempe said that "to speak only of the one word 'Mass,' eternity alone will tell how grievously sacramental and supernatural life in England has suffered from the disuse of this venerable term." He moved as an amendment that the Synod, while thanking the Committee for their labours, "declines to admit any of their recommendations."

The Rev. Charles Bodington pointed out that "neither our teaching nor our practice would be altered by the adoption of the suggested changes of terminology."

Bishop Jenner, "as the only Episcopal brother present, appealed to the Synod for conciliation."

When the voting took place, fifty-one voted for the Master's motion, and fifty-eight against it. The motion was therefore declared lost. The Society refused to adopt the revised Statutes, and consequently reverted to the old Statutes. The amendment of Brother J. W. Kempe was then put, and was carried, fifty-seven voting for it, and fifty-one against. It is evident from the voting that the Society of the Holy Cross was very closely divided on the subject of revision.

On the second day of the Synod a very important protest was read by Brother Mackonochie. It was as follows:—

"We, the undersigned Brethren and Probationers of the Society of the Holy Cross, being, as members of that Society, part proprietors of a certain property consisting of a number of copies of the *Priests*

*in Absolution*, do hereby refuse and withhold our consent to the destruction of that property; and we do hereby protest against any discussion upon the question of destroying that property in this Synod, on the ground that such destruction, without the consent of us as part proprietors, would be an illegal act."

This protest was signed by Archdeacon Denison, the Revs. John Edwards (now Baghot De La Bere), A. H. Mackonochie, Arthur Henry Stanton, H. D. Nihill, Charles Parnell, John Comper, Thomas Isaac Ball, William Moore Richardson (now Bishop of Zanzibar), John Barnes Johnson (Vicar of St. Mary, Edmonton), James Hipwell, Edward Heath, George Musgrave Custance (Rector of Colwall, Malvern), — Collins, Cecil Wray, and William Crouch (Vicar of Gamlingay).

The friends of the *Priest in Absolution* were determined, if possible, to stop discussion. They objected to the following motion being put to the Synod, but which had appeared on the Agenda paper:—

"That, inasmuch as the book called the *Priest in Absolution* had been withdrawn from circulation, the copies remaining in the Master's hands be destroyed."

So, before this resolution was brought forward, Brother Mackonochie moved "That the resolution on the Agenda paper is not in order."

This last motion was immediately put to the vote, and lost, sixteen voting for it, and twenty-three against.

Brother Macfarlane then moved the motion which had been placed on the Agenda paper; but he was careful to explain that "the book itself needed no commendation; the motion was quite irrespective of the merits of the book. A pledge had been given to the Bishops, and we were bound to redeem it."

The Rev. William Crouch, however, was of a different mind. He boldly declared that "to redeem the pledge to the Bishops would be to break the Eighth Commandment."

The Rev. Frederick William Puller "thought that this

was hardly the occasion for destroying it, but he thought at some future time we might destroy it as lumber."

The Rev. C. D. Goldie said that "we needed such a book as the *Priest in Absolution*."

The Rev. William John Frere (Principal of Hockering Training College, Bishops Stortford) "quoted Brother Bodington's opinion as to the value of the book. He thought that we might put forth another book on Confession, and remarked that Dr. Pusey's work does not touch upon the Seventh Commandment."

The Rev. Robert Eyton (now Canon of Westminster) "said that we were not called upon to give up our private copies of the book." He would support the motion.

The Rev. H. D. Nihill informed the Synod that "he burnt all *bad* literature; he was not ashamed of the *Priest in Absolution*."

Brother Macfarlane's motion was put to the Synod, and lost by a very large majority, forty-nine voting against it, and only eleven for it. After a great deal of discussion the following amendment was passed as a substantive motion, by thirty-four to eight:—

"That this Synod is not in favour of the destruction of the remaining copies of the *Priest in Absolution* at the present time."

What the Society of the Holy Cross has done, in its corporate capacity, with reference to the *Priest in Absolution*, since the Synod whose secret proceedings I have just described, is more than I can say, but I have reason to believe that it still retains possession of the book. So careful have the members of the S. S. C. been to keep their underground proceedings from the knowledge of the general public, that it was not until eighteen years had passed by, after the celebrated exposure of 1877, that any Protestant Churchman was able to see a single secret document of the Society connected with that important event in its history. I have reported the Society's secret proceedings, and the

speeches delivered at its meetings, at considerable length, for what I believe to be sufficient reasons. There is no other way in which the general public can be made acquainted with what is going on underneath the surface. Secrecy cannot be defeated except by publicity. And it is important that the public shall know that many of the men whose secret utterances I have here reported, have since been promoted to high positions in the Church, possibly because their real sentiments were unknown to those in whose hands the higher patronage of the Church has been placed. I have no doubt they will be very much annoyed at being thus shown in their true colours, nor is there any doubt that they will bitterly denounce me for dragging their secret speeches out into the light of day. But it cannot be helped. Certainly the Society of the Holy Cross, as a Society—whatever may be said in favour of individuals—does not come out with much credit to itself. Its underhand dodgery and Jesuitical tactics deserve the contempt of all men who love straightforward dealing. Its filthy Confessional book has never been condemned by the Society as a whole, though a few of its members have written and spoken against it. On the contrary, the Society seems to glory in what many will consider its shame. Individual members of the Society found themselves, in the latter part of 1877, in many instances subject to a great deal of unpleasant criticism from their Protestant parishioners. Some of them put a bold face on the matter, while others published apologies for their conduct. As a rule, these were so worded as to commend the Society of the Holy Cross, instead of condemning it, and at the same time to represent themselves as the victims of unmerited censure. One of the most remarkable of these apologies was that issued by the Rev. John Erskine Binney, at that time Vicar of Summerstown, near Oxford. His parish was, immediately after Lord Redesdale's exposure, placarded with an address to the people, in which it was mentioned that the Vicar was a member of the Society

of the Holy Cross. Mr. Binney did not, in his reply to the placard, deny the charge, nor did he in any way censure the *Priest in Absolution*; but he declared that he had "too much confidence" in the "good sense" of his people to suppose that the placard would "in any way affect" their "mutual relations as Pastor and Flock."

"The chief intent of the placard," he continued, "seems to be to reflect on a certain book called the *Priest in Absolution*, and it chooses to assume that this work is the text-book of the Clergy whose names are mentioned, in some of their most important ministerial relations with their parishioners. Now it may be well for me to say most distinctly that, though I glory in being a member of the Society of the Holy Cross, because I know that in its twenty-five [*sic*] years of existence it has done more, under God, to raise the personal tone of the parochial Clergy than any other institution, yet that I do not know the work in question, nor do I wish to know it."

This document was dated June 22nd, 1877, and although at that time Mr. Binney gloried in being a member of the Society of the Holy Cross, yet when the next secret list of its members appeared *his* name was withdrawn.

I believe that all loyal members of the Church of England will endorse the opinion of the late Dr. Harvey Goodwin, Bishop of Carlisle, who, writing to a member of the Society of the Holy Cross, on December 29th, 1877, emphatically declared that, "It [S. S. C.] has created a scandal in the Church of almost unparalleled magnitude, and it seems to me that the only right course for wise and loyal Churchmen is to wash their hands of it."<sup>48</sup>

<sup>48</sup> S. S. C. *Copy of Correspondence*, p. 2.