

FREQUENT COMMUNION.

- Joannis Bapt. Franzelin e Soc. Jesu.* S. R. E. Cardinalis.
Tractatus de SS. Eucharistiæ Sacramento et Sacrificio. Romæ: Ex.
 Typog. Polyglotta S. C. de Prop. Fide, 1879.
- De Re Sacramentaria, Prælectiones Scholasticæ Dogmaticæ, quas habebat
 Aem. M. De Augustinis, S. J.* Woodstock: Ex offic. typog. Collegii,
 1878.
- Theologiæ Dogmaticæ Compendium.* H. Hurter, S. J.
- Œniponte.* Libraria Academica Wagner, 1881.
- Le Confesseur de la Jeunesse.* Rev. Père L. J. M. Cros, S. J. Toulouse,
 1877.

THE works here mentioned are a standing proof, if such were needed, of the untiring zeal of that great Society which has produced and still presents innumerable champions in every field of literature, and especially those who do valiant service not only in battling against error in its many modern forms, but also in presenting the entire system of the faith once delivered to the saints reasonably and distinctly. In every age, from their institution by St. Ignatius, and in nearly every country, they have been eminently the great thinkers of the Church, from the Council of Trent to that of the Vatican, in each of which their learning and piety were most conspicuous. Yet the practical work, enduring beyond any praise, is probably to be found in the vast erudition of their theologians, who constantly are engaged in enriching the Church of the living God, the mother they love so well, by their marvellous talent in presenting clearly and definitely the most abstruse doctrines, and making the same to be living verities for the salvation of souls.

This is, indeed, the ulterior motive of the existence of that Society which has for its motto the symbol A. M. D. G.—*Ad majorem Dei gloriam*—emblazoned on its banner. And since the greater glory of God consists in the salvation of souls by making known the truth, it has always been the aim of these faithful soldiers of the cross to excel in leading men to a knowledge of the means divinely instituted to attain the end of creation; to know, reverence, and adore their Creator, and thus forever be happy.

The means of advancing in this nobler life of the soul, or spiritual life, are found in the Church, which teaches authoritatively all truth. They may be called, in some sense, subjective and objective. The former require, at all events, some correspondence with Divine grace; the latter include this, indeed, but by the institution of Christ possess in themselves an active principle, whereby cer-

tain graces, not otherwise attainable, are conveyed to the soul of him who places no positive hindrance in the way. The former, always supposing sufficient foregoing grace to act, consist in a thoughtful consideration of one's origin, destiny, and condition,—an examination of one's life; meditation on truths which constantly present themselves to sober minds; and finally, prayer, as the outburst of our needs to Him who can help us.

The Sacraments, however, are of an infinitely greater value, for they are the channels of God's mercy to man, and by the will of Jesus Christ, their Founder and Author, have the power of conveying to the soul that grace which they signify; and this takes place by their own intrinsic worth wheresoever an absolute hindrance be not interposed. This efficacy is contained in each, according to its nature and the object of its institution, which object varies, indeed, according to the different conditions of life, covering every state of society in which men are found. The Sacraments, therefore, offer a complete armor against human frailty, or they lift fallen and disabled nature, which was never destroyed, but only wounded and weakened by original sin, and further depressed by actual transgressions; they give to our lives some foretaste of eternal peace; they elevate our minds to heavenly desires and make us wish for our heritage of true dignity.

Since, then, these are the chief means by and through which we can attain salvation, and since these learned theologians have compressed whole libraries into brief and concise shape, as witnessed above, it would be no easy task to formulate sufficient praise for the work accomplished. In order to do so, it would require something of the immense learning they themselves possess, for, speaking in their praise seems like the work of a tyro in arithmetic daring to discuss concerning numbers with a perfect and accomplished mathematician. To any, even the most superficial, reader, however, it must occur that the magnificent apparatus of doctrinal proof from the teaching of the Church, as shown by plain texts of Holy Scripture, not wrested or twisted to agree with preconceived opinions, but interpreted by the best hermeneutical and exegetical skill; the coinciding testimony of the Fathers, whose works are not ransacked and ravaged and forced to say what the writers never could have thought, and what is incoherent with all the rest of their writings, but the well-weighed-out teachings which are in perfect harmony with the body of doctrine they elsewhere inculcate—*simplex duntaxat et unum*. The doctors of the Church, whether Latin or Greek, fully collated, dispassionately interpreted, clearly understood by the ever living practical voice of tradition, are here marshalled in battle array before the thoughtful student. Well may the saints sing pæans of holy triumph for the overwhelming

victory of the infallible Church, which is ever conquering, for she has and maintains superiority as the unflinching witness of truth throughout all ages.

¶We may very fairly infer that our faith is little likely to suffer any diminution when such works, in marked earnestness, are constantly being edited, for they are but the echo of the living voice of these erudite professors, who have youth under their charge from every part of the world, drinking in deep draughts of wisdom from the fountain and source of truth. The vigor of a living voice in the lecture-room, the magnetism of contact with active and energetic young minds, throbbing with anxious questionings, may be wanting in the dead reading of a book, however interesting that book may be. But in these works we seem to live again, and far from having undergone any diminution, our ardor is in full flow. Not only the young student, but even the advanced theologian feels himself in an incomparably better condition than in former days. Here are the forcible arguments of all time placed before us in the most succinct manner; here we have easy access to the studies of those who have borne the toil of the day and the heat; here are the well-formed conclusions of those who have collected from the most recondite, and to us inaccessible sources, all the learning of our predecessors. Not only these hidden stores have been lavishly bestowed upon us, but the modern wealth of science, the true as well as that "falsely so-called" is not ignored, but duly grappled with by these men who spend their venerable lives in laboring for posterity.

He who reaps the greatest advantage is, perhaps, not the student, just making his course of theology, but rather the priest who is on the mission, yet wishes to keep himself fairly well informed in what is to few an alluring study; for it is given to a very small number to have passed more than the mere threshold of the mighty temple of Theology. Now, he who is thrown into the carking cares of an ill-supplied mission has hardly any time to spare in gathering up the arguments of former years, or collecting the apt similes of the Fathers, however striking they may be. Over and above the fact that a full set of these authorities is certainly not possessed by one in a thousand, even if the works were on hand, how many would have time, or patience, supposing even ability to undertake the search after testimonies, the collating of them when found, the joining of them together into one synoptic whole, and, finally, the deducing of practical arguments. We remember that a very learned Father once had the kindness to say to us that the only method of knowing an author, and, particularly, any of the Fathers, is by reading him through and through. How few have done this with any theological work?

What shall we say of the ponderous tomes of the Greek and Latin Fathers? Only those can have done so who had material time at their disposal.

Here, on the other hand, we have no want of industry; no deficit of time unapplied; here is no deficiency in collecting, arranging, examining, and putting in system, what would cost years of trouble, as it costs the learned writers lives of toil and assiduity, to collect and place in form before us a perfect harvest of well-selected crops.

These, surely, are reasons for thankfulness to the authors, quite in keeping with the modest demeanor justly to be observed by us; it is, therefore, by no means our purpose to speak of the relative merits of the treatises, for we admit our incompetence to criticise,—it is not our *forte*,—we rather admit the profound awe with which we look upon so much accumulated learning, and, in all sincerity, we dare to express even in public our heartfelt thankfulness, and an earnest wish that all priests may obtain the works indicated, and make a diligent use of them.

Whilst we merely indicate our appreciation of the Dogmatical part referred to, it would be well that the practical portion, especially treated by the Rev. Father Cros, S. J., should be read carefully by our clergy. Few books have ever fallen in our way more signally concise in their statements than is the work having for title *Le Confesseur de la Jeunesse*. It is a real treasure, not only for the practical direction of youth, but also of every age and condition of life. After giving in compendious words the facts belonging to Jansenism—that foul insurrection against the voice of legitimate authority, which spread insidiously and rapidly under the guise of superior sanctity, and deluded many Catholics, and left its trail of slime in so many different ways on the theology of France and Belgium and other countries—the assertion is made that the originators of this sect had a design to withdraw the faithful both from their allegiance to the Sovereign Pontiff, which was evident, and from the use of the Sacraments, especially the two which are, and ought to be, of daily importance,—Penance and Holy Communion. Whether or not they actually foresaw what would be the logical effect of their teachings, they certainly obtained such influence over the press as to possess control over many of the spiritual works thence issued, and these were thoroughly saturated with the spirit of ostentatious severity characteristic of the leaders. Instead of bringing the sinner to Christ, in showing that the name Jesus signifies, in its full sense, “He will save His people from their sins,”—St. Matth. i: 21, they represented Him as a formidable judge, who had no compassion until, by a full and rigorous course of justice, the offended majesty of God had been previously satis-

fied. The power which He exercised for the benefit of sinners seemed rather a *reward* of their own good works than a merciful bestowal of omnipotent power by God upon men for the elevation of human nature. In the false theory held by them long and multiplied expiations were requisite in order to receive a favorable sentence. The texts of Scripture which present our Lord as having come "not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance," were carefully kept in the background, whilst the terrific judgments of God upon the impenitent—and all were depraved entirely—were fitfully poured out after a truly Calvinistic method. The choice of a confessor was described as something which required a matured judgment, of which the young were incapable in the nature of things, and the old, or more advanced in years, could not reasonably be expected to make. Then, it was made to be high treason to change one's spiritual guide, and not even in religious communities was the selection free. The examination of conscience was to be made after the most strenuous style, and unless this had been rigorously carried out by the sinner he should be put off until he had done so to the satisfaction of the confessor, who was thus to impress upon his penitent the depth of his depravity. Added to all this, things were asserted to be sins which are not; precepts were made which nowhere appear as obligatory; they proclaimed that sins are possible of commission by us without any knowledge on our part; asserted the utterly depraved nature of man; insisted on the confession of such circumstances as do not change the nature of a sin; reproached in harsh tones the poor sinner who, when he comes, stands much rather in need of help and encouragement, and who has this always in his favor, that the very fact of coming of his own accord is *primâ facie* evidence of his good disposition and actual desire for advance.

The opposite of all tenderness towards the sinner was a standing proof of heresy.

But, if they thus treated the ordinary sinner who had begun to feel, from the saddest experience, his need of the grace of the Sacrament of Penance, what shall we say of the harshness with which they pursued those who fell again? They kept them from the benefit of absolution, and consequently from Communion, under the specious pretext of thus rendering themselves worthy of participating in this *reward of merit*. And to keep up this illusion they constantly kept praising the "primitive church," as they were pleased to style those ages when a system of public penance had (what they should have mentioned) only a temporary place in the polity of the Church. Thence long exhortations on the *Flentes*, or Weepers, who stood at the doors, and, bowed down in grief, testified the sincerity of their sorrow; or on the *Prostrati, Audientes, et Con-*

sistentes. In order to restore this pristine rigor, at least as much as possible, long and arduous penances were kept up after the siege of preparation for admission to first Communion, and between that and the subsequent one, and the intervals were made as protracted as the case would admit. Directions of such impracticable character were given, that earthly duties could not be duly attended, and thus the frequenting of the Sacraments was rendered odious, all, mark you well, under the garb of the absolute necessity of greater preparation. The worst form of Jansenism cropped out, however, in the treatment of children and young persons. They were not heard in the sacred tribunal until a definite year had been attained. Even then, despite the fact that children are very different in their precocious mental developments, absolution was invariably refused until they were about to be stretched on the Procustean couch of a first Communion year. This was a favorite theory among the Jansenists, which found not a few imitators even among those who, had they only thought, would never have permitted such perversion of right reason.

After such lengthy arraignment of some of the charges proved against the Jansenists and their adherents, the learned author gives an instruction of the Holy Father, Pius IX., of happy memory, under date March 12th, 1855, to certain French prelates concerning the insufficient manner in which children are prepared for their first Communion, and the time and the method of taking care of them spiritually, both before and after. This instruction is given by the author in full, and deserves very particular mention.

“It has been represented to His Holiness that sacramental absolution is refused to young folks before their first Communion, leaving them, one cannot say on what theological principles, even up to the age of twelve or fourteen years, in a truly dangerous state, in a spiritual point of view.

“Moreover, that even after their admission for the first time to the Holy Table, it is usual to debar them from Communion, even at the Paschal season, and to keep them from the same for a long time, in some places.

“And that there are even seminaries where the custom reigns of keeping the young pupils for several months from Holy Communion, under the pretext of making a riper preparation.

“Knowing of what importance the Sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist are for keeping and preserving the innocence of youth; knowing that the frequent use of the Sacraments contributes admirably to the budding piety of these young hearts, we could hardly admit the exactness of these charges, despite the authority of those who attested them; nevertheless, information

taken from various places established the fact that in a notable measure the *désordres signalés* really exist.

"In consequence, the Holy Father, wishing to put an end to practices so contrary to the spiritual interests of youth, . . . asks you to reform such method, it being opposite to the spirit and discipline of the Church.

". . . . Thus we shall see that young people are everywhere admitted, in a suitable manner, to the frequenting of the Sacraments, and the deplorable customs to the contrary will disappear."

The plan, therefore, of keeping young people from the benefit of the actual use of the Sacraments is distinctly condemned.

In reference to the age at which a child is bound to make the Paschal duty, we have the *minimum* fixed by the IV. Council of Lateran: "Postquam ad annos discretionis pervenerit, semel saltem confiteatur, suscipiens, reverenter, ad minus in Pascha, Eucharistiae Sacramentum." The age of discretion is certainly not the same for all children, but the weight of authority seems to denote the obligation as certainly binding in the tenth year; no *minimum* is in any way fixed for permission to give Holy Communion, beyond the general words of the Council of Trent, session xxi., chap. iv., "Eadem Sancta Synodus docet, parvulos, *usu rationis carentes*, nulla obligari necessitate ad sacramentalem Eucharistiae Communionem," whilst, in like manner, St. Thomas teaches, "quando jam pueri incipiunt *aliqualem usum rationis* habere, ut possint devotionem concipere hujus Sacramenti, tunc potest eis hoc Sacramentum conferri."

If the adage, "train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it," be the Scriptural expression of "the twig being bent, the tree will be inclined," nothing can be of greater importance than the anticipating of evil in the tender mind of the child, by having our Lord to take possession before actual evil has had the chance to find a resting-place. As the Sacraments are not a recompense of virtues which we possess, but remedies against vice, and auxiliary forces divinely appointed, and necessary for even good wills, we should see that the child be placed betimes in proper guardianship. Now, since the year of one's first Communion is usually the best spent, and experience seems to state that after one's first Communion there is still and always marked need of sacramental grace, frequency of Communion should be inculcated, since Christ does not say: "If you receive absolution you shall have life,—he who receiveth absolution remains in me and I in him," but He does say: "He that eateth Me, the same also shall live by Me."

Not only has no law ever been made discountenancing frequent

Communion, but, on the contrary, the most ancient voice of the Church, the perpetual tradition as handed down by the Fathers, councils, and saints, as well as by all orthodox spiritual advisers, inculcates the advisability and even necessity of approaching often to this eternal fount of divine assistance.

What, then, are the dispositions absolutely required to make a fruitful communion? The Council of Trent, Sess. xiii., Chap. vii., says expressly: "Ecclesiastica consuetudo declarat eam probationem necessariam esse, ut nullus sibi conscius mortalis peccati, quantumvis sibi contritus videatur, absque præmissa sacramentali confessione ad Sacram Eucharistiam accedere debeat."

In order to approach Holy Communion in such manner as to fulfil the apostle's precept, "Let a man prove himself" (1 Cor. xi., 28), it is not required that more should necessarily be done than to use such diligence as would be manifested by men who are seriously engaged in a matter of importance in every-day life. This in strict necessity requires, for the purpose in hand, a diligent inspection of those sins which are known to a man's conscience to be weighty, and the conscience of each is sure to speak when untrammelled. Should still further guidance in knowing sins be required, the spiritual director will judiciously impart the same. Then, detesting these sins, with an earnest purpose of amendment, make a true and entire confession of them, with a willingness to accept and perform the satisfaction imposed. Should it happen, as it very frequently does, that nothing serious weights the conscience, there is no law to hinder an approach to Holy Communion, and the fruit will certainly be produced by the efficacy of the Sacrament in virtue of the promise of Christ: "He who eateth Me, the same shall live by Me" (St. John vi., 58). In either case there will be no fear of falling under the terrible ban of the apostle of "eating or drinking . . . unworthily . . . not discerning the Body of the Lord" (1 Cor. xi., 27-29). This takes away the smallest pretext of calling the Sacrament of Penance a torture of conscience, *conscientiæ carnificinam*, so much harped upon by ancient and modern heretics, and it entitles the sinner to that repose of soul which is otherwise not possible even on merely human grounds; much less can it be called a torture when there is a divine command to examine, and, in conformity therewith, if serious sins appear, to confess, accept guidance, and hear the application of that power which Christ exercised, promised to the Church, and daily grants, through His priests, to the suitably disposed: "Whose sins ye shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins ye shall retain, they are retained" (St. John xx., 23).

As to smaller faults, which have very justly the title of *venial*, we have distinctly the teaching of the Council of Trent, Sess. xiv.,

Chap. 5, "taceri citra culpam, multisque aliis remediis expiari possunt." Hence, whilst we may confess them with great advantage, yet there is simply no obligation, *per se*, of doing so. The Council insists that the Eucharist is remedy for past, antidote against future sins, and aliment of grace for our souls, whence the doctrine may be summed up for the comfort of timid souls, that no *antecedens*, foregoing, venial sin can hinder the effect of this Divine Sacrament. That by no accompanying, *concomitans* fault (in one free from mortal sin) is an increase of habitual grace impeded, but no increase of sensible devotion is promised at all, or probable, in such case. "Sumi autem voluit Sacramentum hoc, tanquam spiritualem animarum cibum, quo alantur et confortentur viventes vita Illius qui dixit: 'Qui manducat Me, et ipse vivet propter Me, et tanquam antidotum, quo liberemur a culpis quotidianis, et a peccatis mortalibus præservemur,'" Sess. xiii., Chap. 2.

The pious author finishes his work by stating that the whole object of it is chiefly to trace out the general method approved by the Church, through councils, doctors, and saints (whose testimony he produces), in the administration of the Sacraments of Penance and the Holy Eucharist. That these Sacraments must be used for the cure of souls, and that youth should be specially fortified by frequent approach to these sources of grace. It follows, and is subsequently touched upon, that with those who are already accustomed as young people to come to them greater fruits of sanctity may be lawfully and surely expected, but that to advance in the path of virtue without the use of the Sacraments is truly "il voler passar per l'aer' senz'ali,"—an attempt to fly wingless.
