

a writer without a name. The story is set down as a 'fact' about marriage. But the 'fact' happens to be a sheer fiction—the sort of slapdash romance that is all too frequently contributed to the columns of the secular press by slipshod amateurs who fancy they know something about Church history and theology, and can impart that knowledge to others. The subject is much too vast for anything but the most summary treatment in the limited space of an editorial paragraph. A few brief references, however, from Christian antiquity will suffice to enable our readers to mark how plain a tale can put down the anonymous writer's story.

The Anglican Dean of Lichfield, in his 'History of Marriage' (p. 43), says, writing of the presence and miracle of Christ at the marriage feast of Cana in Galilee:—

'None can doubt that the benediction which He gave to the bride and the bridegroom at Cana of Galilee must have impressed the guests and spectators with a new and sacred sense of its (matrimony's) forgotten dignity. The early Church, a true exponent of its Founder's mind, had no hesitation in interpreting His presence as indicative of His desire to sanctify afresh the union of man and wife, and to bless it in the name of Him "by Whose gracious gift mankind is increased."'

The great St. Ambrose, for instance, died in the year 397—over a thousand years in advance of the magic date 1112. Yet in his 'De Abraham' (i., 7) he describes matrimony as a 'grace-conferring mystery or Sacrament. So does St. Augustine ('Tract. IX. in Joann.'), who flitted to the Better Land in the year 130. So, too, does St. Cyril of Alexandria ('Joannis Evang.', cap. ii., 1-11), who passed to the higher life in 411. Much more might be said as to the mind of the Church, both in East and West, in regard to the sacramental character of Christian marriage before the year of grace 1112. The writer in question confounded two things that are quite distinct: the belief of the Church in regard to marriage, and the formulating of that belief in the shape of a dogmatic decree. The Catholic teaching regarding marriage is now held by a large and growing section of Anglican Protestants. In the fifth edition of 'A Manual of Instruction for Members of the Anglican Church,' by the Rev. Vernon Staley, we read, for instance, (p. 273): 'Holy Matrimony, or Marriage, is the Sacrament which hallows the union of man and woman, and bestows upon them the grace to live together in godliness and love.'

'There is no doubt,' says Procter (Anglican), in his 'History of the Book of Common Prayer' (17th ed., pp. 405-6), 'that marriage has been solemnised with religious rites from the earliest times of the Christian Church.' And in his 'History of Marriage,' Dean Luckock (also an Anglican), says (p. 43): 'From the very beginning of Christianity, the sacred character of the marriage rite asserted itself, and the presence of the bishop or priest to conduct the service was made indispensable.' St. Ignatius of Antioch, for instance, required the marriage ceremony should be performed only by the counsel or direction of the bishop (Ep. ad Polycarp., n. 5). And be it noted that St. Ignatius died about the year 107, in the very dawn of the Christian faith. Here is an extract from Tertullian, who died about the year 240 ('Ad Uxor. ii., 9):—

'Unde sufficimus ad enarrandam felicitatem ejus matrimonii quod ecclesia conciliat, et confirmat oblatione, et obsignat benedictione, angeli renunciant, Pater noster ratio habet?'

Thus, nearly a thousand years before the days of Pope Innocent III., Tertullian finds himself unable to express the happiness of a marriage that is brought about by the procurement of the Church, confirmed by the offering of the Sacrifice of the Mass, and sealed and sanctified by the blessing of the priest. What further need is there to add testimony to testimony—to

cite Fathers and Councils for a matter that is within the knowledge of every tyro in liturgical and ecclesiastical history? But the scrap of dislocated historical romance which we have been criticising serves to point a moral. And the moral is, the danger to faith that is incurred by those of our co-religionists who bar the Catholic paper out of their homes, and make the secular press their sole journalistic gospel.

The Best-guarded Secret

A paragraph in the current issue of the 'N.Z. Grocer' (Wellington) has set some sensitive Catholic readers asking themselves:

'Are things what they seem?
Or is visions about?'

Here is how the story, as told by the 'Grocer,' runs:—

'A woman was charged at Greenwich with the unlawful possession of two Gladstone bags. A clergyman refused to give evidence which he had received from the woman "as a priest and in confidence," and which might have proved the woman's guilt. The magistrate informed him that for this refusal he could be committed to prison for seven days. He still declined to give evidence, and was accordingly removed to the cells. The woman was remanded. Subsequently the clergyman consented to give evidence.'

A big percentage of the readers of the 'Grocer' have probably taken this to be a case in which a Catholic priest revealed a sacramental confession, or part of a sacramental confession, to a civil court. But it was nothing of the kind. The clergyman in question was an Anglican. He described himself, in his evidence, as a 'priest' of the Church of England. Only that and nothing more. No Catholic priest appeared in the case. The seal of sacramental confession never entered into dispute. And there was no violation of that sacred priestly trust. The substance of this correction has been sent for publication to our Wellington contemporary, and will, no doubt, appear in its columns in due course.

It was said of von Moltke: 'Er konnte in sieben Sprachen—schweigen': he had learned the art of holding his tongue in seven languages. But the Catholic priest knows something better than the mere cunning that uses words to conceal thoughts. To him the seal of confession differs from every other form of human secret. Without the full and free consent of the penitent, no revelation may—even to save the life of the confessor—he made of any part of the matter of confession: of any mortal or venial sin disclosed in confession; nor of the circumstances of any sin; nor of any secret defect brought to light in the confession of sins; nor of the sins of accomplices; nor of the penance imposed; nor, in brief, of anything that goes to make confession burdensome to the penitent. And this sigillum or seal of confession binds the priest not alone to the outside world: it binds him even towards the penitent, so that he may not by word, act, look, gesture, sign, altered demeanor, or in any other way, reveal to him outside of the sacred tribunal his sense or remembrance of anything that he has heard within it. Moreover: the priest is bound never to disclose even the smallest tittle of what comes under the sacred sigillum. No door—not a chink—is left open for the gradual entry of laxity into this relation of sacred confidence between penitent and priest. The silence is—apart from the full and free consent of the penitent—absolute and eternal. The old Spanish proverbial saying phrases it well: 'A secret known to two persons is God's secret; a secret among three is all men's property.' The secret of the confessional is in an especial way 'God's secret,' for in a real sense it is less known than if it were never known. It is the figure of the sins of the truly repentant that are thrown into the deep and silent places of the sea, where they shall never again be cast up, either upon the shores of time or of eternity.

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