

"I am quite willing to admit that it is an evil for the mind to dwell upon impurity; but the object of going to confession is to speak of it once and for the last time, in order to cease dwelling upon it and to get rid of it once and altogether. Conscience makes men brood over their sins; but penitence and forgiveness blot them out. It is, of course, painful to the priest to have to listen, as it is often very painful to the physician to hear many things that are said to him. But neither can stop to consider what is good for himself; each has a duty to perform, from which he cannot conscientiously finch. . . . Few people have any adequate idea of the amount of hidden vice that pervades the population of our large towns. But few would give any credence to the ghastly tale that could be told of the amount of moral degradation and depravity which exists in all classes of society, and even at all ages. . . . It no doubt saves an immensity of trouble and anxiety to ignore the evils around us. But should we thus fulfil that law of love of which I have spoken, if—conscious of the festering sore in our midst, the wide development of this mysterious taint, this curse of our nature—we yet put forth no voice to dissipate the ignorance, stretched out no hand to help the weakness, held up no hope to promote the cure? It may be possible to attack open vice in other ways, but hidden sin can only be discerned and cured in private confession. . . . The old saying that 'prevention is better than cure' is quite as true in regard to sin as it is to disease, and it is the power of confession as a preventative that makes it so incalculably valuable in the case of children. It is of immense importance to nip sin, as it were, in the bud; for cure is difficult when growth has taken place. The practice of confession may be said, therefore, to possess a sanitary value. Sir John Forbes, whose book I have already quoted, gives (p. 81) remarkable evidence of this value amongst the Irish Roman Catholics, and tested his facts by the Poor-law returns."

My third witness is a young French nobleman, entitled Count Albert de la Ferronnays; and that his words are words of weight we know by the judgment passed upon him by one of the most illustrious of his fellow-countrymen who have adorned the century—the Count de Montalembert. Montalembert said, speaking of some of the beautiful thoughts to which he commonly gave expression—"These are things which, if they were in a printed book, as the poor people say, would be admired by the whole world. So, at least, it seems to me. I know of nothing finer in Réne, or any of the great writers who have described the workings of the heart. To me there seems something wonderfully satisfactory, and even I think honourable to the human mind, in the knowledge that such beautiful thoughts arose quite simply and spontaneously in the pure and modest mind of a young man unknown to all literary fame, without the least idea of publication, only occupied with God and his love, and never dreaming that passages were flowing from his pen which the greatest genius in the world might have coveted." ("A Sister's Story," E. Bowles' trans.) Albert de la Ferronnays, then, wrote to an English Protestant concerning confession as follows:—"You say that you cannot understand confession. I will not speak of the happiness it affords, for we must have practised it to appreciate its value. But, my dear friend, do you think that because every man knows, as you say, that he ought to be good, it is useless that he should be reminded of it, and that his own reflections always suffice? There are in words directly addressed to ourselves by a living person a power and fulness which we should seek in vain in books and in our own thoughts. The man whose life is a perpetual struggle against his passions knows by experience all our miseries and sufferings. He is acquainted with the malady, and the means to overcome it; he rouses us from apathy, comforts us in affliction, and restores to us hope and trust when we are cast down. You say again that it will not excuse me before God to plead that I have learnt my errors from a priest; but this is exactly the danger from which we are safe. The priest can neither deceive nor be deceived; for his doctrine is not his own; he gives us that of which the Church is the keeper, in which we have all one and the same faith, and form one and the same body." ("A Sister's Story," E. Bowles, trans.)

My third witness is a French Catholic lady named Eugénie de Guérin. Her view of confession was written in her journal intended by her to be read by her brother only. She said of it, "This is not for the public; it contains my inmost thoughts, my very soul; it is for me." The extract I now give you is taken from Mr. Matthew Arnold, the English Rationalist writer. He has reviewed the journal of Mademoiselle de Guérin, and we shall find him comment not unfavourably on this particular part of it. But first let us hear him testify to the nature of the lady who wrote it. "He calls her 'one of the rarest and most beautiful souls,' and again, 'this religious and beautiful character,' and again he says, 'she thus united extraordinary power of intelligence, extraordinary force of character, and extraordinary strength of affection; all these under the control of a deep religious feeling.' M. Sainte Beuve also has testified to her nature and called her, 'This pure and innocent spirit, this dove of Cayla (her native place).' Here then is Mademoiselle de Guérin's testimony to the confessional as given to us by Mr. Matthew Arnold:—"But her Catholicism is remarkably free from the faults which Protestants commonly think inseparable from Catholicism; the relation to the priest, the practice of confession, assume, when she speaks of them, an aspect which is not that under which Exeter Hall knows them, but which, unless one is of the number of those who prefer regarding that by which men and nations die, to regarding that by which they live, one is glad to study. 'La Confession.' She says twice in her journal '*n'est qu'une expansion du repentir dans l'amour*;' and her weekly journey to the confessional in her little Church of Cabuzac is her '*cher pèlerinage*;' the little church is the place where she has '*laissé tant de misères*.'" "This morning," she writes on 28th of November, "I was up before daylight, dressed quickly, and started with Marie for Cabuzac. When we got there, the chapel was occupied, which I was not sorry for. I like not to be hurried, and to have time before I go in to lay bare my soul before God. This often takes me a long time, because my thoughts are apt to be flying about like these autumn leaves. At ten o'clock I was on my knees, listening to words the most salutary that were ever spoken; and I went away, feeling myself a better being. Every

burden thrown off leaves us with a sense of brightness; and when the soul has laid down the load of its sins at God's feet, it feels as if it had wings. What an admirable thing is confession! what comfort, what light, what strength is given me every time after I have said, *I have sinned*.' This blessing of confession is the greater, she says, 'the more the heart of the priest to whom we confide our repentance is like that divine heart which has so loved us.'"

Who is it that tells us confession tends to defile the minds of women? Let him read here his condemnation! All Catholic women are not indeed altogether such as was Mademoiselle de Guérin. She was an exquisite genius, and owned the rare poetic mind; but every Catholic woman in her degree will recognise that the description given here is a true one. She also invariably brings back from the confessional some good thing given by God, as this lady in another passage says of herself, and oftentimes leaves many miseries behind her there.

My fifth witness also refutes this most gross accusation. He is an English Protestant gentleman, of high standing and repute, Sir John Forbes, a physician of eminence. He wrote, although otherwise no friend to the confessional, contradicting the slander referred to; he said—"So far from such being the case, it is the general belief in Ireland—a belief expressed to me by many trustworthy men in all parts of the country, and by Protestants as well as Catholics—that the singular purity of female life among the lower classes there is in a considerable degree dependent on this very circumstance. No general statements, however strong, unless supported by evidence of the most positive kind, can be admitted against the testimony of facts like these; and if the confessional is to be condemned—and I am far from saying that it is not—its condemnation must rest on something else than its influence in leading to vice and immorality among the Catholics of Ireland." (*Memorandums made in Ireland in the Autumn of 1852*, vol. ii. p. 83.)

My indirect witness is the famous, and, sooth to say, formidable, *Saturday Review*. The article I quote from appeared in its issue of June 12th, 1879, and was a refutation of certain calumnies advanced against Catholic teaching by the French Deputy, M. Bert. The passages which I consider to bear particularly on my subject are the following:—"Were M. Bert's estimate of the teaching of the Catholic clergy correct every decent Frenchman would long ago have withdrawn his daughters from their control. He would not have needed to inquire what the teaching itself was like; its character would have been sufficiently displayed in the effect produced on the scholars. According to M. Bert the Jesuits are chiefly employed in teaching young men and women how far they may go in breaking the Ten Commandments without being guilty of mortal sin. It is impossible that some millions of young girls should be consistently trained to deal with the Seventh Commandment in this spirit without their conduct being very plainly influenced by the process. How does it happen, then, that the virtue of Catholic Frenchwomen is at least equal to that of the women who have thrown off all ecclesiastical restraints, and that men who have themselves quarrelled with the Church constantly send their daughters to be educated in convent schools? Neither of these facts can be denied. Even their Radical neighbours will bear witness to the simple lives led by the wives and daughters of the reactionary deputies who have been resisting the adoption of the 7th clause. It is not they who have made Paris the scene of so many scandals. When the nominal Catholics who composed the Court of Napoleon III. were running riot in every form of vicious extravagance, the ladies of the Faubourg St. Germain were attending to their children and looking after the poor. And now, when the nominal Catholicism of the Second Empire has given way to the undisguised secularism of the Third Republic, the reaction is not the less fortunate in the contrast."

The Catholic woman impure! The indignation which we Catholic men might justly feel at such an accusation gives way to our astonishment at its insolence, and glaring falsehood. The Catholic woman impure, and made so by her faith! It is to the Catholic faith womanhood to-day owes its purity and the veneration in which it is held throughout all civilization. Again I appeal to non-Catholic testimony for the proof of my assertion, and Mr. Lecky the historian of rationalism, answers my appeal and furnishes me with all I need. Listen, then, to what he says:—"The world is governed by its ideals, and seldom or never has there been one which has exercised a more profound, and, on the whole, a more salutary influence than the medieval conception of the Virgin. For the first time woman was elevated to her rightful position and the sanctity of weakness was recognised, as well as the sanctity of sorrow. No longer the slave or toy of man, no longer associated only with ideas of degradation and of sensuality, woman rose in the person of the Virgin Mother into a new sphere, and became the object of a reverential homage of which antiquity had had no conception. Love was idealised. The moral charm and beauty of female excellence were fully felt. A new type of character was called into being; a new kind of admiration was fostered. Into a harsh and ignorant, and benighted age, this ideal type infused a conception of gentleness and of purity unknown to the proudest civilisations of the past. In the pages of living tenderness which may a monkish writer has left in honour of his celestial patron, in the millions who, in many lands and in many ages, have sought, with no barren desire, to mould their characters into her image, in those holy maidens who for the love of Mary, have separated themselves from all the glories and pleasures of the world, to seek in fastings and vigils and humble charity to render themselves worthy of her benediction, in the new sense of honour, in the chivalrous respect, in the softening of manners, in the refinement of tastes displayed in all the walks of society: in these and in many other ways we detect its influence. All that was best in Europe, clustered around it and it is the origin of many of the purest elements of our civilisation." ("Rationalism in Europe," vol. i. pp. 213-14.) Here is a picture of womanhood fostered by the Catholic faith, exalted by it into purity and dignity, and placed on a pedestal higher than that on which stands a manhood better than the manhood that of old despised and maltreated it; a picture, too, of manhood refined and cultured by the Catholic teaching concerning womanhood, of society purified and