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Well did Bishop Andrewes write: "Vestri homines, dum figuram unam fugiunt, mille se quæstionibus involvunt" ("Ad Bell. Resp.," p. 214. See Cosin, "Hist. Transubs.," ch. vii., § 24; and especially Bramhall, "Works," A. C. L., vol. i., pp. 14-19).

No wonder the "Ego Berengarius" stands condemned by such a teaching as this. How could the literal and natural stand before such a forced and unnatural¹ interpretation as that which results from the full-grown doctrine of transubstantiation? No wonder that the orthodox gloss of the thirteenth century condemned the orthodox language of the eleventh century. No wonder that the "Ego Berengarius" had to bear in its margin the words, "Nisi sane intelligas verba Berengarii, in majorem incidēs hæresim, quam ipse fuit."

N. DIMOCK.

(To be continued.)



ART. III.—ABSOLUTION.

(Concluded.)

THERE is no doubt that this is the sense of the "Absolution" in morning and evening prayer. (1) It is there simply declaratory; but even there we must be carefully on our guard against the idea that God's pardon is conveyed by this declaration. The message of pardon is thereby conveyed, but the pardon itself is given direct from heaven to all believers, whether present at the time or not. "He pardoneth and absolveth *all them* that truly repent, and unfeignedly believe His holy Gospel," a statement which is conclusive that the pardon is not conveyed by the message, but by faith to every believer direct from God. (2) The "Absolution" in the

otus est Christus" (Lombard, "Sent.," lib. iv., dist. xii., f. 315; Paris, 1588).

See also Bonaventura's "Apology for the Ego Berengarius," in "Sent.," lib. iv., pars i., dist. xii., quæ. i.; Op., tom. v., p. 143.

Note also the following: "Sub speciebus illis erat passibilis, sed erat ibi impassibiliter" (p. 133).

¹ According to Bellarmine (to use the words of Jeremy Taylor): "The pronoun demonstrative does only point to the accidents, and yet does not mean the accidents, but the substance under them; and yet it does not mean the substance that is under them, but that which shall be; for the substance which is meant is not yet: and it does not point to the substance, but yet it means it: for the substance indeed is meant by the pronoun demonstrative, but it does not at all demonstrate it, but the accidents only" ("Real Presence," sect. v., § 4; "Works," vol. vi., p. 50, edit. Eden; see also sect. vi., § 8, pp. 64, 65).

Communion service is obviously and beyond doubt *precatory*—that is, it is simply a prayer for God's pardon, which He alone can give. (4) But in the Visitation of the Sick, considering that "I absolve thee" was never used for twelve centuries, that the indicative was never used at all, whether "I" or "we," except in reference to the remission of Church censures or discipline, considering the fact that all this must have been well known to the Reformers, it is not to be believed that they shut their eyes to the plain facts of history, and used the indicative to refer to sin against God at all in any sense, declaratory or otherwise; and I agree with the conclusion so ably maintained by Blakeney in his history of the Book of Common Prayer, that the "I absolve thee" of this service refers to the removal of Church censure. The "Absolution" in the Visitation service, as you remember, reads thus: "Our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath left power to His Church to absolve all sinners who truly repent and believe in Him, of His great mercy forgive thee thine offences; and by His authority committed to me, I absolve thee from all thy sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen."

The first part is a prayer to the Lord Jesus Christ for *forgiveness*. And this prayer contains the announcement that Christ has left power to absolve, and describes the absolving power as left to the Church—*i.e.*, a congregation of faithful men. Christ holds "forgiveness" in His own hands, but He has left to His Church the right as a society to cut off unworthy members and to restore the penitent; and this right the officer of the Church proceeds to exercise in his pronouncement of the absolution. So Wheatley, who points out that in the collect immediately following pardon and forgiveness are *still* most earnestly desired, for which there could be no need if the penitent were already pardoned by God, by virtue of the absolution just pronounced, and thence argues that the previous absolution is intended by the Church to refer to ecclesiastical censures and bonds.

These censures in those days were very serious and "weighty matters" for a dying man. The Visitation Articles of the Bishops of the time show that the power of excommunication was exercised long after the Reformation. They ask: "Have you anie among you that be denounced and declared excommunicate? And do anie of your parish keep society with them before they be reconciled to the Church and 'absolved'?"

Excommunication was exercised long after the Reformation, and excommunication and absolution, therefore, are coupled together in the Homily for Whit Sunday: "Christ ordained the authority of the keys to *excommunicate* notorious sinners,

and to *absolve* them which are truly penitent." "Absolution" thus would mean either (1) the Church's formal removal of Church censures for offences against the Church, a very "weighty matter," which would press heavily on the mind of a dying man; or (2) the proclamation by the Church in her services of God's mercy in Christ's blood to all who repent and believe; but it is in the former of these senses that the words "I absolve thee" are used in the Visitation of the Sick, "the total disuse of which service the Church would never have allowed according to the sixty-seventh canon, but have insisted on its use by every minister, and its reception by every member, if she regarded it as the Divine sentence of remission of sin." I have so far spoken of the announcement by the Church in her services of God's pardon, or the prayer by the Church for God's pardon, or the remission by the Church of offences against herself and the removal of her censures and sentence. But there is another absolution and a higher pardon, which is *judicial*, as of a Judge on His throne, and direct; and for the original terms of that absolution, as laid down with infallible truth, we turn to the inspired records of that "higher, holier, earlier, purer Church," which are found in the sacred pages of the New Testament.

On this matter we say with Cranmer :

Step after step,
Through many voices crying right and left,
Have I climbed back into the primal Church,
And stand within the porch—and Christ with me.

Nothing is more remarkable than the contrast between the direct and indicative forgiveness meted out by Paul and the Corinthians for their erring brother's sin against the Church, and the treatment by Paul and the other Apostles of sin against God.

Their practice, whether as regards masses of men, as in Acts xiii. 38, or individuals, as in Acts xvi. 31, was to preach God's forgiveness, and the practice of the Apostles proves that they understood their Master's commission to the Church in John xx. 23, "whose sins" to be completely fulfilled by "preaching pardon through faith in the blood of Jesus," and precisely as St. Luke's inspired paraphrase of them explains them in Luke xxiv. 47, "that repentance and remission of sins should be *preached* (not "given" or "conveyed," but *preached*) in His name among all nations," and as a host of witnesses even in the dimmest times interpreted them, as Jerome, and Chrysostom, and Augustine, and Lombard, down to our own Cranmer and Becon, understood them. This Becon, who defines absolution as "verily a *preaching* of the free

deliverance from all your sins through Christ's blood," speaking of the text in John xx., says: "This is the meaning of the aforesaid text." Whosoever the ministers of the Lord's Word declare unto me the sweet promises of God the Father in Christ's blood, and I believe them, then are my sins forgiven me at the very instant; but if I do not believe them, then are my sins retained, that is to say, not forgiven, and this is the interpretation of the Fathers and of the Evangelists and Apostles.

No Church dreams of applying them in their literal and absolute sense without bringing into them some explanation. Romanizers drag in from outside that which is not found either in the practice of the Apostles or in the primitive Church, and interpret them thus: "Whosoever sins (after their secret confession to you) ye remit (by your judicial absolution in the form 'Ego absolvo te') are remitted."

We interpret them in accordance with the language of the prophets and evangelists of the Old and New Testaments, "Whosoever sins ye (declare to be) remitted (through faith in Jesus Christ's most precious blood) are remitted (by God to all believers)." The words in brackets necessary to our interpretation bring in the Lord Jesus Christ and faith in His blood. The words in brackets necessary to the Roman interpretation bring in the awful system of the confessional, whereby the black shadow of the priest is made to stalk, not merely between man and wife, but between the sinner and his Saviour.

The promises of God's mercy in Christ are recorded formally and plainly in the inspired pages of the New Testament, and are offered in a hundred passages to all believers. Though deeply indebted thereto, no Christian is, therefore, *dependent* upon the formal proclamation of the Church to which he belongs, nor upon the utterance of any priest, minister, or officer of that Church. He has the message proclaimed by the Holy Spirit in the Bible, and if with a penitent heart he believes that message, his sins are forgiven then and there. Precious and valuable as is the proclamation of the Church when in accordance with the Word of God—as we may thank God is the teaching of this Protestant Church of England, raised up by God to be a horn of salvation in this land, and to witness not merely *against* mediæval corruptions, but also, as the name Protestant implies, to testify *for* the truth as it is in Jesus—we are not dependent upon her announcement for forgiveness of our sins. We have access to the fountain itself of heavenly radiance; we can hear the Holy Spirit say, "Be it known unto you, men and brethren, that through this Man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins, and by Him *all that believe*

are justified from all things from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses" (Acts xiii. 33). And "to Him give all the prophets witness, that through His name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins" (Acts x.).

Precious and valuable as is the ministry of the Church, we are not *dependent* on it, or on any sermon, for access to God, or for the pardon of our sins, nor upon any set phrase of words whatever; for the way to the holiest of all has been made open for us by the blood of Jesus, and He invites us, even us sinners, to come to Himself, unless we read His words backwards, and are smitten with blindness, groping at noon-day. It is Jesus who says, "Come unto Me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest;" it is Jesus who says, "Him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out;" "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come; and let him that heareth say, Come; and whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely." The absolution of Jesus is not conditional; He can pronounce an absolution higher than a prayer and stronger than a declaration. He, the omniscient and heart-searching God, He who loveth us and hath loosed us from our sins by His blood, and He alone, can say, "Thy sins be forgiven thee! Go in peace!"

Beyond the clouds, within the veil,
Is the fit Priest for me;
He came from heaven to save my soul,
He died on Calvary!

Jesus, God's well-beloved Son,
Jesus is priest for me;
He speaks the gracious words I want—
"Ego absolvo te."

T. S. TREANOR.

ART. IV.—MR. CURZON ON MISSIONS IN CHINA.

I SOMETIMES wonder what would become of our newspapers if they treated their political, commercial, sporting, or theatrical columns with the treatment which they mete out to the fragments of space devoted to religious matters. Imagine the *Telegraph* or *Standard* sending a reporter to the Oval who did not know Mr. Grace from Mr. Stoddart, or understand the difference between a cut and a drive! For every department of life, except religion, it is deemed essential to employ an expert; but when anything has to be written upon a religious question—other than Church politics, such as Disestablishment and the like—it seems to be an accepted principle that an outsider is the best judge.