

REVIEWS

PRIEST AND PENITENT. A Discussion of Confession. By John C. Heenan, D.D. (Sheed & Ward, 7s. 6d.)

The Sacrament of Penance is of such great importance in the spiritual life, that any attempt to remove the obstacles, real or imaginary, to its frequent and fruitful reception is deserving of notice, and, in so far as it is a successful attempt, of grateful commendation. In *Priest and Penitent* Fr. Heenan deals ably with some of the objections raised by non-Catholics to the theory and practice of confession, and explodes a number of the terrors and difficulties that are supposed to lurk in the penitent's part of the confessional. He presents the Sacrament of Healing in its true light, namely as a God-given means of forgiveness and grace, exactly suited to the needs of human nature. Confession is to be viewed, not as a severe and humiliating condition of capitulation imposed by a ruthless conqueror, but as the Divine Physician's prescription for the cure of our sick soul and its restoration to perfect health. The later chapters contain some practical hints on preparing for and making confession.

In the course of the book there are a few statements which are, to say the least, questionable. Is it *always* wrong (p. 159) to discuss anything that the priest has said in confession? We do not see why. Nor have we any means of judging whether "the vast majority of unmarried converts believe themselves to be called to the religious life within the first six months of their conversion" (p. 164), and we are curious to know the evidence on which this generalisation is based. Again, it is surely an exaggeration to say that the scrupulous person (p. 181) "is almost always intolerably proud." The confessor who is under the influence of this preconception is unlikely to acquire the patience and sympathy so necessary in deal with genuinely humble souls that are the unfortunate prey of scruples. Nor will these victims of scrupulosity themselves be helped, but rather further discouraged and in the technical sense *perplexed*, when they read that their scruples almost certainly proceed from intolerable pride.

Several other expressions are to our mind inaccurate and misleading. For instance, while we appreciate the difficulty of explaining to the layman—or to anyone else, for that matter—the nature of Sanctifying Grace, we consider it an over-simplification to say, as the author does (p. 20) that "Grace means Charity or the Love of God." Again, the sinner does not rob God of the final success of His plan, even incidentally (p. 57), though it may be truly said that he does so, as far as lies in his power. Lastly, the Absolution of the priest is not "a declaration in the name of God that the sins of the penitent are forgiven" (p. 63):

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it is the act whereby the priest in the Name and through the Power of God actually forgives us our sins. "Whose sins *you* shall forgive . . ." "I absolve thee from thy sins . . ."

These are incidental blemishes in an otherwise admirable little work, in which a difficult subject is treated with considerable insight, sympathy and discretion.

ALEXANDER L'ESTRANGE, O.P.

SOCIOLOGY AND POLITICS

THE NECESSITY OF FREEDOM: NOTES ON CHRISTIANITY AND POLITICS. By Douglas Jerrold. (Sheed & Ward; 7s. 6d.)

Christian civilization faces its crisis; its enemies stand menacingly at the gates; if it is not to be destroyed it must marshal its forces and attack, for "we must conquer or be conquered": Mr. Jerrold here gives a detailed statement of a familiar interpretation of this thesis. There is much that is true, and needs saying. There is a good deal that one cannot help thinking ill-considered, such as the remark that "man's claim to freedom rests, not on his intelligence, as fools believe . . ." (St. Thomas was one of the fools); or the cavalier treatment of Mr. Aldous Huxley, which would have been impossible if *Ends and Means* had been studied; or the definition of the new Italy in terms of a "long-deferred and sadly-needed flowering of the Puritan spirit in the Catholic South." Further, there is too often a tendency to allow reiterated assertion to take the place of reasoned argument.

What is more important, because it affects the essence of the thesis, is its *simplisme*: the frequent occurrence of such phrases as "the reason (or cause, or truth, or what not) is, of course, simple," on the one hand, and "folly," on the other, is revealing, for if things are indeed so simple we are lamentably foolish if we cannot recognize the so luminous truth. This *simplisme* is apparent on almost every page: the League Covenant is disposed of without difficulty, and without consideration of the principles of natural and Christian law which, however imperfectly, it embodies (Benedict XV, D'Azeglio, are not mentioned); Russia ought unhesitatingly to have been excluded anyway; China is no more than an "imitation of European Socialism"; the Spain of Franco will resemble Portugal or Italy rather than Germany, since the former are its allies; it is admitted, in answer to an imaginary objicient, that "a perfectly Christian social order has never existed," but not that the present confusion of elements in Western culture makes the concept of defending Christian civili-