

SACRAMENTAL CONFESSION

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Sacramental confession by John S. Howson

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JOHN S. HOWSON

**SACRAMENTAL
CONFESSION**

SACRAMENTAL CONFESSION

BY THE VERY REV.

JOHN S. HOWSON, D.D.

DEAN OF CHESTER

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CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

A SLIGHT glance at the chapters which compose this book will show that it is intended merely for popular use. Elaborate arguments on the subject to which they relate I leave to those who have more leisure: exhaustive historical treatment of the subject to those who have larger learning. This is a question which can be dealt with very usefully without the possession of the two great advantages of leisure and learning. The Confessional Controversy is not like the Eucharistic Controversy, for instance, which can hardly be treated adequately without touching on metaphysical subtleties, or with-

out some considerable research. The doctrine and practice of Sacramental Confession are in immediate and well-understood contact with our social and domestic life: they have certain broad general features, easily elucidated from Holy Scripture and from History; and practical issues are raised by them, which can be stated very clearly, and can be readily apprehended by any person of ordinary intelligence.

That the question before us has deeply moved the public mind in England is quite evident; nor is it at all likely that general interest in the subject will speedily decay. Those who desire to re-introduce into the Church of England the theory and habit of Sacramental Confession are conspicuously in earnest; and, meanwhile, the meetings held in reference to this matter in various parts of the country, whatever be the value of the utterances made on such occasions, have shown very clearly that the utmost repugnance is widely felt to the efforts which are diligently made by some of our Clergy, with

the acquiescence of some of our Laity, to bring back amongst us a discarded system.

When any religious topic thus largely pervades the general mind, and is productive everywhere of uneasy thoughts, if Clergymen who hold positions of special responsibility are silent regarding it, they create the impression that they are glad to evade that which is the main point for the moment, and that they are wanting in proper courage. At such a time the people at large look to the Clergy, if not for guidance, at least for information. Our chief guidance indeed must come, of course, from the Bishops; and we have reason to express gratitude for several Episcopal statements on the subject, which are prudent and moderate on the one hand, and explicit and reassuring on the other. But all who are in the ministerial office have their duty too in reference to these matters; and especially they are bound to call to mind that ordination-vow which pledges them to use their best endeavours to "drive away" doctrines alien to the religious system which