

**CONFESSION: A
DOCTRINAL AND
HISTORICAL ESSAY**

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Confession: A Doctrinal and Historical Essay by L. Desanctis & M. H. G. Buckle

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L. DESANCTIS & M. H. G. BUCKLE

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ESSAY.

BY
L. DESANCTIS.

TRANSLATED FROM THE EIGHTEENTH ITALIAN EDITION

BY
M. H. G. BUCKLE,
Vicar of Edlingham.



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1878.

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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE.

IT might at first sight appear extraordinary that a work which awoke such a lively interest in Italy as to pass rapidly through eighteen editions, and was likewise translated into French and German, should have attracted so little attention in this country as not to be presented to the public in an English dress. But the difference in the relations of the ministers of religion to the people in Roman Catholic countries and in Protestant England is sufficient to remove any ground of surprise. Among populations subject to the sway of Rome the baneful influence of the confessional is universally and keenly felt. From the palace of the sovereign to the meanest hovel of his meanest subject, all, without distinction, have to experience the galling oppression of its yoke. To the individual, the family, and the state, its operations are equally hateful and pernicious. While the Inquisitor fastens only on the body of the suffering martyr, the confessor, with a refinement in cruelty, tortures the most delicate and sensitive

feelings of his victim, and triumphs in inflicting the most excruciating mental agony. To add moral pollution to satanic tyranny, the young of both sexes have their imaginations defiled by minute* and demoralizing inquiries, which, instead of stifling vice, only suggest new forms of it. The parents groan in secret at the prospect of their offspring being subjected to the same debasing process which has sullied the purity, and overclouded the happiness, of their own lives. Too often the wife, reduced into submissive bondage to the confessor, is covertly instigated to rebel against the husband; and family discord is insidiously fomented by priestly interference, invisible in its action, but acutely felt in its results. In important questions affecting the family welfare—the education of the children, the professions of the sons, and the marriages of the daughters—the father finds his rightful authority superseded by the silent encroachments and underhand influences of the con-

* The encyclical letter of Benedict XIV., in Chais, *Lettres sur les Jubilés*, vol. 3, p. lxxi., sq., contains the strictest injunctions on confessors to be minute in the investigation of particulars. In support of his views he quotes the authority of Innocent III., Conc. Lat. iii., cap. *omnis utriusque sexus*, and Rit. Rom. tit. *de sacr. pœn.* That the Papal see cannot complain of any want of zeal, on the part of its servants, in executing its mandates, is amply attested by the foul contents of various manuals of confession.

fessor. The mutual confidences of home disappear; its tenderest sympathies are destroyed; its fondest associations are marred and disfigured; and the cold shade of the priest casts a withering blight over its best and purest affections. When the work of Desanctis appeared, incontestably proving, to the astonishment and delight of the Italians, that the system of confession was as contradictory to Scripture, antiquity, and reason, as it was fatal to social happiness and national prosperity, its publication was welcomed with eagerness. Edition after edition was exhausted; and a shock was communicated to the Papacy in Italy, under which it continues to reel and stagger to this hour. England, for more than three centuries, has been happily exempt from this moral pestilence; but lately the plague has reappeared; the infection has been propagated with marvellous rapidity; and "The Confessional" of Desanctis will be, at least, a timely, and in many cases, it is to be hoped, an efficacious antidote.

That the author was thoroughly versed in the mysteries of the subject which he treats, may be inferred from the fact that for fourteen years he exercised the office of confessor, and that for seven he held the highly responsible post of parish priest at Rome—being thus, in conformity with Papal usage, brought into intimate relations with the secret police;

while for ten years he fulfilled, though reluctantly, the faculty of consultor to the Roman Inquisition, and would hence be introduced behind the scenes of the religious and political drama enacted at the Papal See.

As a natural consequence of his abandonment of an Antichristian Church, it would follow that his motives would be misrepresented, and his character maligned; for when did any person eminent for learning, eloquence, and virtue, turn his back upon the City of the Seven Hills, and not be cruelly calumniated?* A record of the slanders thus showered on the good and great would compose a volume unparalleled for the virulence and atrocity of its falsehoods. Even from among their own communion, writers occasionally express their indignation at the rancorous mendacity of the Papal champions. Peter Walsh, of the Order of St. Francis, and Professor of Divinity, has the honesty to write thus:—"It were worth the while to consider what it is hurries on our Catholic writers generally to such exorbitant passions and barbarous language (besides many lies and mere calumnies often) against all those who leave our Church" ("Four Letters, etc.," p. 69; ed. 1686). If ever the motives of a change of creed deserved respect, they should have met with reverential consideration in

* See Appendix, note (A).

the case of Desanctis. Fully aware of the extent of the loss he was about to undergo, knowing that he exchanged honour for disgrace, wealth for poverty, fame and distinction for obscurity and disrepute, he heeded not the amount of the sacrifice, but forsaking country, family and friends, he counted all things but dross, so that he might enjoy the clear sunshine of an untroubled conscience, and proclaim with untrammelled freedom the rich mercies of the Gospel in all their purity and fulness. It is curious that for his emancipation he was indebted to one of the many honours heaped on him till they almost equalled in number the years he had been in holy orders. Being appointed to deliver a course of lectures against heretics, he received a licence to read their works. Gradually the light of Divine truth dawned more and more clearly on his mind; and the more earnestly he strove and prayed to be led into the right way, the more did his growing persuasion of the errors of the Church of Rome deepen in intensity. To maintain a struggle against conviction was inconsistent with the candour and integrity conspicuous in the character of Desanctis; and henceforth he resolved to preach the faith which he lately studied to destroy.

Seeking an asylum under British rule in Malta, he found the Romanist inhabitants as barbarous and