

The Catholic.

Quod semper; quod ubique; quod ab omnibus.

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SELECTED.

AMICABLE DISCUSSION.

Continued.

LETTER III.

ON THE INFALLIBILITY OF THE CHURCH.

"Yes Sir, you will say to me, I see with you and our reformers the evils that have come from their principles. In spite of myself I must acknowledge that men have abused to their ruin the rights that had at first been given to them, I am struck also with what you have said to me on the infallibility of the Church, your proofs embarrass me. I know not what reply to make. nevertheless, Sir, excuse my boldness. I am an Englishman, I love and adore liberty. Your principles of authority destroy it. They are adapted for nothing but to make slaves, and a slave I can never become."

I was expecting to see you fly to this strong entrenchment and your last refuge, Sir, I am aware of the sentiments of your countrymen and their ideas of liberty, ideas which they carry even into the sanctuary. I remember that during my residence in London, even one of your Bishops (Dr. Hoare), if my memory serves me faithfully published a work in which he pushed to excess this objection against the catholic principles. I read the work at the time, and was scandalized, not to say indignant. How, said I to myself, how can a man endowed with reason and great talents persuade himself that he is made a slave of, because it is proposed to him to submit his private and individual opinion to the uniform opinion of all the bishops of the earth? Liberty then, according to him, would be for each individual to prefer his own self to the highest authority of the world. But is it not the height of pride and the last degree of extravagance "Not to submit to such an authority, would be the height of pride and the blindest arrogance. What more manifest proof can there be of our ingratitude to God, than to place our glory and exert our efforts in opposing an authority, which he created to be an aid and assistance to us?"

But Sir, because upon the single fact of revealed dogmas you are required to follow the decisions of antiquity, of all the councils universally adopted, will you on that account consider yourself as degraded from your liberty and treated like a slave? Were they slaves in Italy, in Germany, in France, Spain and England, where so many celebrated universities flourished, where so many great men

*St Augustine to his friend Honoratus on the Utility of believing the Church chap. XVII

have appeared in every state of life and every branch of science. To produce only one, but he the first of all, Bossuet, was he in your opinion a slave he whose vast genius embraced so many sciences and treated them like a master, he whose inimitable and supreme excellence subdued all the enemies against whom he fought, made so many conquests to truth, and erected so many immortal trophies to religion? But, you will say, as far as relates to dogmas, at least, Bossuet was a slave, since he teaches so boldly that when the Church has spoken, we have only to believe and be silent.

One moment, Sir, I pray. I may perhaps have something to say to you, which will produce a salutary confusion at your notion, and banish it for ever from your mind. Tell me, if you please, should Jesus Christ re-appear upon earth, or rather if you had had the happiness of seeing him and hearing his instructions, would you have refused him obedience? Would you have considered yourself a slave because he commanded you to believe in his word? You say nothing. Well then! the authority to which you are at the present day to subject yourself is still the authority of Christ. It is not the voice of man, that you obey by hearing the Church, but that of Jesus Christ. He has spoken by his apostles as all christianity agrees. He has spoken by his successors, and even as far as the fifth age, protestants are all agreed upon this. He continues to speak and will speak to the end of the world, by their means; this is demonstrated; he himself has said it, promised it, and often repeated his assurance of it: for this you have heard all the proofs.* Throw then aside your low ideas of servitude, and feel yourself much more ennobled under the yoke that your divine Redeemer has with his own hand placed upon you, and upon the whole human race without exception,

LETTER IV.

ON THE AUTHORITY OF TRADITION.

At the same time that reformers were pretending an absolute deference & an exclusive submission to the Holy Scripture, they united all their hatred and all their attacks against the infallibility of the Church. This disposition ought not to surprise you; Sir; the reason of it you will easily discover. It is not without

*"I will say more: I declare to you that, if I were born a catholic I would remain a good catholic, knowing well that your Church puts a very salutary restraint upon the wanderings of human reason, which finds neither bottom nor shore, when it attempts to sound the abyss of things: and I am so convinced of the utility of this restraint, that I have imposed upon myself a similar one, by prescribing to myself for the remainder of my life, some rules of faith, from which I do not allow myself to depart." (J. J. Bossuet, in his answer to M. Seguier de Saint-Brisson, dated, Noisyers, July 22, 1764.) A very remarkable acknowledgment, forced by experience and reflection from a man of all others the most proud of his reason and liberty of thinking.

reason that they fear an impartial and inflexible judge, whose eye is always open and cannot be escaped, and whose sentence is unchangeable: there is no imposing upon a supreme tribunal, the office of which is to maintain the law in its integrity, to call to it those who are gone astray, to explain it to those who misunderstand it, to rectify all their errors, by giving to the text its just and true signification; a tribunal armed moreover with a sacred authority to condemn & proscribe the refractory and contumacious. The only means of escaping from its condemnation and anathemas, was to dispute its title of divine authority, and to annihilate, had it been possible, its jurisdiction. The authors of the reformation saw full well, that they had no other plan to adopt. they adopted it, and employed all their efforts to bring it to bear: they flattered themselves they should succeed by substituting for the judgment of the bishops the authority of the word of God, so religiously revered by all the faithful, so imposing to christian ears: and as they reserved to themselves the right of interpreting it, there remained nothing more to be feared in their appeal from the Church to the scripture, that is to say, to an insensible and passive letter, which signifies whatever we please, and bears every, the most opposite interpretation without objection or reply, because it is dumb: which suffers violence and is put to the torture, and utters no complaint, because it is dead.* They establish, then for their first maxim, that the judge of faith was not the Church, but the holy scripture. I am going to examine this principle with you: and if the arguments I have to oppose to it are not much weakened by my pen, you will I think, have to conclude that it was absolutely untenable in itself and in its consequences.

For the second maxim, they taught that every thing essential in religion was in the scripture and certainly, if the scripture was the sole rule of faith, the whole system of faith must be found there entire. The inference is logical, but not less false in

*"Speech is to writing what a man is to his portrait. The productions of writing present themselves to our eyes as if living; but if we interrogate them, they hold a dignified silence. It is the same with the scripture, which knows neither what it should conceal from one man, nor what it should say to another. If it is attacked or insulted without cause, it cannot defend itself; for its father is never there to defend it; so that he who imagines that he can establish by scripture alone, a clear and durable doctrine, as a great simpleton." (Plat. in Phaedr. Op. t. X. edit. Bipont. p. 382.) Glory to the truth! (exclaims upon this the eloquent Comte de Maistre) if the Word eternally living does not vivify the scripture, never will the scripture become the Word, that is to say, Life. Let others then, as long as they please, call upon the dumb sword, we shall laugh in security at this false god, always waiting with a tender impatience for the moment in which its deluded votaries shall cast themselves into our arms, open to receive them now for nearly three hundred years."