

The Catholic.

Quod semper; quod ubique; quod ab omnibus.

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Winter Evening Dialogue between John Hardman and John Cardwell, or THOUGHTS ON THE RULE OF FAITH, in a SERIES OF LETTERS, &c. &c. continued from p. 153.

LETTER V.

I. Sentiments of Protestants on the tendency of Bible Societies. 2. Rev. A. O'Callaghan. 3. Speeches of the late Catholic Archbishop of York, and the late Catholic Bishop of Chester in Parliament.

Gentlemen, *Kirkham, May 24, 1817.*

These arguments of Mr. Cardwell are, in my estimation, sound, sensible, and unanswerable. They shew clearly, that no sect of Protestants follow the Bible alone; and that our pertinacious clamours on this subject are sometimes indeed the outcry of fanatical delusion, but more commonly the language of prejudice, artifice, or insincerity. They further shew, with a clearness which could neither honestly palliate nor sincerely deny these five things. First, that the Catholics truly venerate the Bible, and piously use it for their instruction, their comfort, and consolation. Secondly, that they lay no restrictions and prescribe no limitations on the perusal of it, but such as reason, faith, and piety recommend. Thirdly, that if we except enthusiasts, whose eccentricities are no rule to the sobermindedness of faith, all Protestants do admit a Church authority in the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures, no less than the Catholics. Fourthly, that the question at issue between the Catholic Church and Protestantism is not, as your pamphlet boldly asserts, that the Protestant follows the Bible, and no other authority but the Bible; while the Catholic despises and degrades the Bible to follow human authority. And therefore fifthly, as all churches do in fact and necessarily admit authority, the real question at issue between them is, what church authority is most authentic, most competent, most consistent, most secure. It is to ascertain whether, in all these respects, the Catholic Church, or the very best of all the Protestant churches, be preferable. It is to decide, whether the ancient church, or modern institutions; whether the unchangeable Church, or ever-changing sects; whether the Universal Church, or local heresies; whether the Apostolic Church, or Luther's substitutes is authorised by heaven, and best qualified to direct the faith, and give security to the consciences of sincere Christians in the way of truth and salvation. This is, or ought to be the substantive object of enquiry, the real subject of discussion between us.

And really, Gentlemen, I frankly confess, that the weighty arguments of my friend Mr. Cardwell

have made a deep impression on my mind. They have dissipated some of my most inveterate prejudices, enlarged my knowledge, and qualified my mind to form a more correct judgment on the Rule of Faith, and on the respective claims of the Catholic Church, and her competitors to be regarded as the true Church of Christ. They have persuaded me that the Catholic is not that ignorant, foolish and Bible-hating creature, who, according to your representation, prefers the opinions of men to the express word of God, and who can give no reason why he believes this, or practises that, but that he has at least plausible motives for his partiality and preference, and "is ready always to give an answer to every man, that asketh him a reason of the hope that is in him."

I. Desirous of still prolonging our conversation I made some observations on Mr. Cardwell's arguments. I regard not, said I, the opinions or complaints of Henry VIII. or Queen Elizabeth, respecting the abuses which sprung from an injudicious reading of the Bible. I despise the tyrannical statutes of those ecclesiastical despots. They lived in the ferment of the Reformation, before men's minds were settled, and before correct notions prevailed. We live in an enlightened age. The harmlessness, the utility, the obligation and necessity of all men reading the Bible, are now universally admitted. All parties emulate each other in promoting the efforts of the Bible Society to furnish every individual with the pure rule of divine truth, undebased by the notes and comments of fallible men. They all consider this the surest, the only way to disseminate religious truth. None can contest the wisdom and policy of their institution, but those whose opinions are at variance with the Scripture,

Mr. Cardwell resumed. I turned your attention to the two first heads of your church, Henry VIII. and his daughter, both to point out the date of its origin, and to shew you how sternly your church was admonished, in her earliest infancy, that the Bible alone was not sufficient either to fix her faith, or preserve her existence. But she has been admonished of the same truth in every succeeding generation, by the voice of her prelates, the zeal of her clergy, and the authority of the legislature. This I could easily substantiate, by a reference to the writings of your divines, the proceedings of your convocations, the decisions in the ecclesiastical courts, and various parts of the statute books. But these I shall omit, and come at once to what is passing before our own eyes. If it be a scandal to assert, that the Bible ought to be read with some

precautions; and that its operation on ignorant and fanatical minds is more likely to prove hurtful than beneficial, your church must now be content to take its share of the reproach. The Bible Society, which originated about thirteen years ago among the Dissenters, and was subsequently encouraged by the patronage and wealth of many distinguished members of your communion, has within these few years excited much attention, and voluminous discussion. The result is remarkable. It has spread a serious alarm among the watchmen of your Holy City. It has taught them the necessity of changing their language. It has led them to abandon their once favorite but fanatical outcry of the Bible alone, with which they were wont to insult and triumph over Popery, and to adopt in their turn the good sense, the language and arguments of Popery, as a shield of self-defence. The Catholic Church alone is steady to her principles, and always consistent with herself. Your clergy, Mr. Hardman, though less changeable than many others, may with propriety assume for their motto:

Tempora mutantur et nos mutamur in illis.

One of your prelates sees danger in the distribution of the Bible without the accompanying interpretation of the Thirty-nine Articles, the Prayer Book, and Catechism. Others deserv danger without the guidance of the Homilies, and other acrimonious tracts against Catholics and dissenters. Nay, a few months ago the Archdeacon of Huntingdon, in his primary Visitation Charge, has given a graduated scale of the distribution of Bibles and the increase of felons, for some years past; and has proved, or at least attempted to prove, that in the same ratio that Bibles are distributed, felons increase. They tell us, that the Scriptures are full of passages hard to be understood: that it is dangerous to put them into the hands of the common people without comments: that the reading of the Scriptures by the prejudiced and the ignorant leads to schisms and heresy: that men should recollect the saying of the apostle St. Paul: "If any preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed." (Gal. i. 9.) and that those who thus corporate with the Dissenters, should ponder well the words of St. John: "If there come any unto you and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed." (2 John i. 10.) It is surprising, but true. In reading some of the late publications of your prelates and clergy, we almost fancy that we are reading the Catholic controverts of former days. We find them employing against the Dissenters the same sentiments, the