

The Catholic.

Quod semper; quod ubique; quod ab omnibus.

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AMICABLE DISCUSSION.

Continued.

LETTER III.

ON THE INFALLIBILITY OF THE CHURCH.

So much excess, so many crimes, which were daily committed in the reform, at last opened the eyes of the leaders upon the principles which they had at first put forward, and made them understand that they must change both their method and their language. Blinded creatures! not to have known sooner, that to destroy, there is nothing more required than that enthusiasm & intoxication to which the multitude is so prone; whereas when they wish to rebuild, know they not in what manner to bring back to order and subordination the minds that have been once infatuated with their religious independence! However that may be, the reformers employed for this purpose all the resources of their mind, the credit they enjoyed with princes, and the little controul they still retained over the people. See with what ardour poor Melancthon set himself about it: "Would to God, would to God, said he, that I might be able, not indeed to confirm the domination of the bishops, but to re-establish their administration! for I see what kind of a Church we are going to have, if we overturn the ecclesiastical government. I see that tyranny will be more insupportable than ever.—What will be the condition of the Church (continues he) if we change all the ancient customs and there be no longer any fixed prelates, and conductors?"

"Our brethren blame me, because I give jurisdiction to the bishops. The people accustomed to liberty, after having once shaken off the yoke, are unwilling to receive it any more; and it is the towns of the empire that hate this dominion the most. They do not trouble themselves about doctrine and religion, but only about power and liberty."

Some time after this, it appears that the ministers and the principal persons of the party struck in with his opinion: for instead of saying, our brethren blame me, he says now: "Our brethren are agreed that the ecclesiastical mode of government by which bishops are recognised as the superiors of many Churches, and the bishop of Rome superior over all the bishops, is permitted. It has also been permitted to kings to give revenues to the churches: so there is no dispute about the superiority of the pope and the authority of the bishops; and the pope as well as the bishops may easily preserve this authority. For the Church stands in need of conductors to maintain order, to have an eye over those

who are called to the ecclesiastical ministry, and over the doctrine taught by the priests, and to exercise ecclesiastical judgments; so that, if there were no bishops, we must needs make them. The monarchy of the Pope would also tend very much to preserve agreement in doctrine among many nations. Thus we should easily agree upon the superiority of the pope, if we were agreed upon all the rest, and kings might themselves easily check the encroachments of the pope upon the temporalities of their kingdom." What reflections does this passage, and many others which I could produce, occasion on the irresistible force of experience and truth, which oblige men to recognise the principles which they themselves had overturned. Melancthon is not the only one who entertained these opinions in these times. You will have remarked this declaration; "Our brethren are agreed." In the confession of Augsburg, they had already proclaimed tolerably loudly the authority of the Church, the agreement of the ancient Church, of the Catholic Church, and even the doctrine of the church of Rome. I have given you the passages above. As for the Calvinists, without retracing here the multitude of professions of faith, and of synods, the object of which evidently was to instruct and to hold people's minds in subjection, by the voice of authority, I shall notice some sentences of the synod of Delft, because they have more closely imitated the language of the Catholic church, and almost adopted the same doctrine.

The remonstrants had advanced that the synod with which they were threatened would not be infallible like the apostles. It was not easy for the Calvinists openly to deny this; the synod of Delft, however, answered them in these words: "Jesus Christ who promised to his apostles the Spirit of truth, whose lights should conduct them in all truth also promised to his church to be with her to the end of ages, and where two or three are assembled together in his name, there to be in the midst of them:" from which they conclude, a little later, "that when pastors from several countries should be assembled, to decide according to the word of God, what must be taught in the churches, we must, with a firm confidence, be persuaded that Jesus Christ would be with them according to his promise." Now the declaration of a provincial synod (and this should be observed) was afterwards read and approved at the national synod of Dordrecht, called by all the party the almost oecumenical synod, because, in fact, in it were found deputies from England, Scotland, the Palatinate, Hesse; Switzerland, Geneva, Bremen, Emden, in a word, from the whole body of the reformation, not joined to the Lutherans, with the exception of the French, whom reasons of state kept away, but

who approved of it afterwards. We see here the whole of Calvinism brought back in its turn to the principle of authority, as was Lutheranism before it, in the confession of Augsburg.

The particular teachers who have since appeared, and who have shewn more learning and moderation, in both parties, have adopted the same principles and held nearly the same language. I do not even entirely except M. Jurieu, whom I could cite to you, were it not of more consequence to make you acquainted with a more grave and more solidly instructed personage, M. Molanus, the Abbe de Lokkum, the friend and fellow-labourer of Leibnitz, in the project of conciliation carried on for some time, between them and Bossuet, but which unfortunately failed. M. Molanus assigns as the third rule of faith "the interpretation of the scripture adopted by common consent or authorised by the practice of the ancient and modern church,—or which should be approved by a general council held legitimately and freely. All christians are agreed (says he) upon the following points: 1st, such or such councils are not always necessary of themselves, but only on account of certain circumstances, as when the troubles of the Church cannot otherwise be appeased. 2dly. It is agreed that the interpretation of scripture given by the council should be preferred, at least exteriorly, to that of any individual: on this account the confession of Augsburg declares that a general council is the ultimate means employed by antiquity to procure the peace of the church, and ought to be resorted to. The synod of Dordrecht, all the councils held by the two parties, and even that of the apostles confirm the same thing. In fine we find still another decided confirmation in the acts of the synod of Charenton, where it is said, that if it were permitted to all and to each one to adhere to private interpretations, there would be as many religions as parishes. 3dly. Again, it is agreed, that the oecumenical councils have very often erred, and that when we attribute to them the assistance of the Holy Spirit, or that infallibility to which all christians owe an inward submission, we have never pretended that such infallibility belongs to them, precisely because they are councils, but because of the subsequent consent of the greatest part of the Church, to which the assistance of the Holy Spirit, is promised." And in the new explanation of his method he says: "If