

ence." As if God could not abrogate the old law to establish the new; or as if the legislature could not repeal, in one session, a law made in another. They have shewn some novelty and ingenuity in the following theological discovery: "This vaunted principle respecting the authority of the Church seems to ourselves," say they, "a sort of deifying of the Church: it has a tendency to wrest the sceptre from his Almighty hand, and to invest her with the powers of Omnipotence, while the practical exercise of this principle, if not actually, is nearly allied to the grossest idolatry." As if this newly discovered species of Popish idolatry, which is just as idle and visionary as the former ones, might not be retorted on themselves, by merely substituting the noun substantive *Scripture*, in the place of their noun substantive *Church*. If I allude to these specimens of their novelty and ingenuity in argumentation, it is not with a view of wasting any observation to correct the obliquity, or dissipate the darkness of ideas, which they exhibit; but to shew you, that your invincible polemics are safer when they stand behind the entrenchments of others, than when they attempt to raise any new ones of their own.

You seem to think, Mr. Hardman, that because these authors quote the Bible, and declaim against Popery, they are profound divines, conclusive reasoners, and enlightened apologists of your parliamentary church. To this opinion I cannot subscribe. Their religion differs no less from the Church of England, than it does from the Church of Rome. Their religion, Sir, like that of many others, who follow Protestant principles, is a clumsy and ill assorted piece of scriptural patchwork, consisting of scriptural shreds tacked together, according to their own capricious taste and fancy, without either the justness of proportion, the beauty of symmetry, or the rule of truth. They set out it is true, on the ground of Protestant principles; but being bolder than you in the art of protesting, they soon leave you many a furlong behind them. They affirm that the Bible contains the whole will of Jesus Christ, and the whole and sole rule of a Christian's faith. They affirm as warmly as you do, "the Bible, I say, the Bible is the only religion of Protestants." We deny these principles. We prove them to be false, delusive, and enthusiastic: We are therefore authorized to reject the conclusions which result from them. You churchmen admit these principles. They are your own. Consistency requires therefore that you should admit the conclusions which these authors legitimately draw from the premises. You are a stout church and king man, Mr. Hardman, and can call out, *No Popery*, in an ale-house, or at a vestry-meeting, as loudly as any inhabitant of our parish. Now let me point out to your reflection one specimen of the reasoning of these authors, in a case which comes home to your own feelings; a case which clearly decides either that your principles are false, or your church is erroneous. It will not only change your opinion as to the merits and orthodoxy of these authors, whom your aversion to our religion has taught you blindly to commend: but will at once

shew you how the Bible may be abused by wanton interpretation; and how inadequately your own favourite Protestant Church of England can defend itself, by Scripture alone, against the arbitrary construction of mere bible-men. These authors take up the Bible, they read it; and what does their contracted and vulgar cast of mind discover? That the Church should be without a clergy, a flock without pastors, save such as are of a presbyterian description. What, you will say, are there to be no Protestant deacons, priests, vicars, rectors, deans, archdeacons, bishops, archbishops, with a king at their head, the Defender of the Faith? No. The independency of their ideas and presbyterian optics can discover none of this Popish trumpery in the Scripture. They tell you, that all such authority is an usurpation of the prerogatives of Christ! In the New Testament they can discover nothing but the laity and *Office-bearers*. They say "the laity constitute the church, and teachers and pastors are its office-bearers." p. 15. I must remark that they have not pointed out either the chapter or verse where this phraseology occurs in the Bible. Following your own authorized version, they find, that a bishop is but an *overseer*, (Acts xx. 28\*); a priest is but an *elder*; (Acts xiv. 23.—xv. 4.), a deacon but a *servant* (Acts vi. 2.) As to an Archbishop of Canterbury, a Bishop of Chester, a Dean of Peterborough, a Prebendary of Westminster, or Durham, a Vicar or Curate

\* The present authorized English version of the Bible still retains a taint of that Calvinistic spirit, which Foreign and British reformers imported from Geneva, and which they copiously infused into the travestied English translations commonly used in the reigns of Edward VI. and Elizabeth. But as the English version stands at present, this spirit is perhaps no where more apparent, than in the translation of the Acts of the Apostles, particularly chap. xx. v. 28. Instead of translating this most important passage, as it is correctly translated in the Latin Vulgate, and the English Catholic Testament: "take heed to yourselves, and to the whole flock, wherein the Holy Ghost hath placed you Bishops, to rule the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." it has contrived to mutilate the sense and degrade the expression to a degree scarcely exemplified in any grave translation from other languages, thus: the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers to feed &c. I shall not stop to prove, what every scholar must admit, that though the metaphor derived from the simplicity of primitive manners and pastoral life *Poisaino*, in its lowest sense, means to feed, as a shepherd does his flock, yet when it is applied by the sacred writers to David, to Christ, or, as in this place, to Bishops, and when it is applied by profane writers to kings, as it is by Homer to Agamemnon, (Iliad. B. II. v. 55,) the verb *feed* does not express one half of its meaning. The word *overseer* is duly qualified to keep company with its degraded associate, *feed*. The lowest degradation to which ingenuity can possibly reduce the etymon *Episcopus*, may be inspector, superintendent, looker-on, overlooker, supervisor, or *overseer*. But does this express half the meaning of the term? As well might we say, that the overseer or supervisor of Durham, is the Bishop of Durham; and with equal propriety might we translate, Christus Pontifex noster, Christ our Bridgebuilder, instead of Christ our High Priest. Much more than an overseer is implied in the venerable term which has been religiously incorporated into the language of almost every Christian nation. No pedigree in the Herald's Office is more honourable or authentic than the etymology of the English word Bishop: in the original Greek, *Episcopus*; in Latin, *Episcopus*, in Italian, *Vescovo*; in French, *Evêque*; in Spanish, *Obispo*; in German, *Bischoff*; in Dutch, *Bischoep*; in Anglo-Saxon, *Bircop*; in English, *Bishop*. If the English Protestant translators of the Bible, in Acts xx. 28. overlooked the English word *Bishop* which never had more than one exclusive meaning, and have degraded the first officer of the church into the lowest underling of a parish, it is not from accident, but design. Perhaps they intended it as a compliment to the Overseers of Nag's Head memory. Certain it is such translating is not the word of God. Mr. Nolan has ably vindicated the authenticity of the Vulgate, in this verse, as well as in the first Epistle of St. John. ch. v. v. 7. from the scepticism of Griesbach and other nibbling critics,

of Kirkham, all these institutions are but the filthy rags of Babylon. These institutions, say they, changing the word Popish for Protestant, are all unscriptural, all an usurpation of Christ's sole and exclusive priesthood. "The application of scripture to such authority," they further tell you, "is such a manifest wresting of the words of Christ, that they find some difficulty in resisting the conviction that your Church has wilfully perverted the Sacred Scriptures, to support her claims to such authority. Their argument stands thus: "The Apostles justly considered that the words of Christ, All power is given to me, peremptorily excluded all separate or conjunct authority. How then shall we reconcile the claims of your church in matters of authority, (even your Protestant church, consisting of a regal head, with bishops, priests, &c., with the offices of Jesus Christ! Her pretensions to such authority, appear to us to be an usurpation of the prerogatives of the Saviour. All authority in matters of religion, except that of Christ, is strange to his people. He is the alone Prophet and King in the Church of God." Our divines are apt to smile, and yours to writhe at these leveling arguments of John Calvin.

Now, Mr. Hardman, I beg leave to observe, that if this mode of reasoning, from the bare letter of the Scripture, be formidable and unanswerable, it is only so to you, and your church authority, not to ours. We stand on more solid ground. This very spirit of your authors, among the Puritans, Presbyterians, and Independents, of former times, employed the same process of the *Bible alone interpreted by fanaticism*, both to overturn your church, to destroy the monarchy, and to deluge England with blood. They justified their rebellion by proclaiming no authority but the authority of Christ: no priest but priest Jesus: no king but king Jesus. To the Bible alone, as interpreted by themselves, they appealed both to justify their wickedness, and to sanction their atrocities. Our reverence for the Bible condemns such a flagrant abuse of the Holy Books, whether it proceed from an ancient Puritan or from the modern Praise-God Barebones, who have written this new, convincing and unanswerable pamphlet. If I did not feel an invincible repugnance to imitate your authors, in wantonly perverting the meaning and profaning the sanctity of the Bible, I could prove from express texts, that you are religiously obliged to wear only one coat; and that when you leave my fire-side, and return home, this cold, stormy, winter evening, you ought to leave both your great coat and your pockets behind. The puritanical pamphlet which you so inconsiderately commend, without perceiving its tendency, is a tissue of confident ignorance, of coarse vulgarity, and blind enthusiasm. It has not convinced me of one error in the Catholic faith: but it has strengthened my conviction, that the Protestant Rule of Faith cannot lead men to the unity of truth; but only into a multiplied variety of errors.

I shall resume the subject of our conversation in my next letter. In the mean time, I am,

Gentlemen,

Your, &c. &c.  
JOHN HARDMAN.