

to learn our doctrines from those who know them best, accounts in some measure for the extreme ignorance, the childish prejudices, the silly contempt, and groundless animosity, which many staunch Protestants betray with regard to our religion. This book you may read without any apprehension of mischief. It will reward your labor, Sir, though I thought it superfluous to prove gravely, points which appear to me so plain and undebatable, I am ready to comply with your wishes. Let me only in the first place assure you, that the three propositions to which you object, are as easily demonstrated as any proposition in Euclid: and that there is no need of many words, nor does it require much gravity of reasoning or solemnity of countenance, to prove truths so evident. It is surprising to see on what weak foundations the strongest Protestant prejudices are commonly built. It is still more surprising, to see how easily you are duped, where you are the least aware of illusion or deceit. You seem little sensible of the tricks which are put on your unsuspecting credulity. Why, Sir, you no more make the Bible the sole rule of your faith than I do. Your catechism, your prayer-book, sermons, conversation, and example, claim at least one half. You are no more allowed freely to cull your religion from the Bible than I am. For unless you happen to collect from it a prescribed set of opinions, you immediately come within the restrictive influence of penal laws. You admit an interpretative authority almost as much as we do: and let me say it, a human authority much more. There is, however, this difference between us. We openly avow it: you deceitfully disclaim it in words, while you artfully admit it in reality. But of these assertions I will vary my mode of proof. Instead of gravely producing any arguments of our own, I will give you the words of well informed writers of your own communion; who have honestly and ingenuously admitted what I assert. Sir Richard Steele, in his Letter to Pope Clement XI. fairly, though humorously, tells the plain truth to his Holiness. His words are these:

"There is no other difference between us but this one, viz. that you (Catholics) cannot err in any thing you determine, and we never do: that is, in other words, that you are infallible, and we are always in the right. We cannot but esteem the advantage to be exceedingly on our side in this case; because we have all the benefits of infallibility, without the absurdity of pretending to it; and without the uneasy task of maintaining a point so shocking to the understanding of mankind. And you must pardon us, if we cannot help thinking it to be as great and as glorious a privilege in us, to be always in the right, without the pretence to infallibility, as it can be to you, to be always in the wrong with it.

"Thus the Synod of Dort, in Holland, for whose unerring decisions public thanks to Almighty God are every three years offered up, with the greatest solemnity, by the magistrates in that country; the Councils of the Reformed in France; the Assembly of the Kirk of Scotland; and, if I may presume to name it, the Convocation of England, have been

all found to have the very same unquestionable authority, which your Church claims solely upon the infallibility which resides in it, and the people to be under the very same strict obligation of obedience to their determinations, which with you is the consequence only of an absolute infallibility. The reason therefore, why we do not openly set up an infallibility is, that we can do without it. Authority results as well from power as from right: and a majority of votes is as strong a foundation for it as infallibility itself."

With us, "Councils that may err, never do: and besides being composed of men, whose peculiar business it is to be in the right, it is very immodest for any private person to think them not so: because this is to set up a private corrupted understanding above a public uncorrupted judgment. Thus it is in the North, as well as the South; abroad as well as at home. All maintain the exercise of the same authority in themselves, which yet they know not how so much as to speak of without ridicule in others.

"In England, it stands thus. The Synod of Dort is of no weight. It determines many things wrong. The Assembly of Scotland hath nothing of a true authority, and is very much out in its schemes of doctrines, worship, and government. But the Church of England is vested with all authority, and justly challengeth all obedience.

"If one crosses the river in the North, there it stands thus. The Church of England is not enough reformed. Its doctrine, worship, and government, have too much of Antichristian Rome in them. But the Kirk of Scotland hath a divine right from its only head Jesus Christ, to meet and to enact what to them shall seem fit, for the good of his Church.—Calvin and the Gospel go hand in hand, as if there was not a hair's breadth between them. In Scotland, let a man depart an inch from the Confession of Faith and rule of worship established by the Assembly, and he will quickly find, that as cold a country as it is, it will be too hot for him.

"We have found out a way unknown to your Holiness and your predecessors, of claiming all the rights that belong to infallibility, even while we disclaim and abjure the thing itself. We have a right to separate from you: but no persons living have a right to differ or separate from us. We make no scruple to resemble you in our defences of ourselves, whenever we think proper.

"And as I observed before, that there was no need for your pretending to infallibility: that it is better taken in the world, and as easy to establish the same authority without it; so here it will be obvious to those of your Church to observe, that there was no manner of necessity upon them to discard the Scriptures, as a rule of Faith open to all Christians, and to set up the Church in distinction to them; because they may see plainly now, that the same feats are to be performed, and with more decency, though not with more consistency, of which few are judges, without carrying things to such extremity. For at the same time that we are warmly contending against your disputants, for the right of the people to search and consider

the Gospel themselves, it is but taking care in some other of our controversies to fix it upon them; that they may not abuse this right; that they must not pretend to be wiser than their superiors; that they must take care to understand particular texts as the Church understands them, and as their guides, who have an interpretative authority, understand them.

"This we find to be as effectual with many as taking the Scriptures out of their hands. And because it is done in this gentleman-like manner, and gives them an opportunity of shewing their humility it passeth very smoothly off; without their considering the absurdity it leads to, that as our doctors differ, and councils too, this method layeth a necessity upon two different men, nay upon the same man in different circumstances, to understand the same text in two different, and often in two contrary senses.

"And here again, with submission to your Holiness, I think we greatly surpass you in our conduct. For we have the same definitive authority which you have, without the reproach of depreciating the word of God: the people all the while being fully satisfied that we allow the Scripture to be their rule. And we do indeed in words preserve all authority to the Scripture; but with great dexterity we substitute, in fact, our own explanations, and doctrines drawn from those explanations, instead of it. And then one great privilege we enjoy above you: that every particular pastor amongst us is vested with the plenary authority of an Ambassador from God; very much different from the maxims of your Church.—But the noisy make most noise every where, and few can contradict them."

3. There is as much truth as wit in these observations of the 'Spectator,' Sir Richard Steele. I do not mean to insinuate, that they prove you to be mere Bible-puppets, who move only as the wires are directed by the hands of the performer. But I do not hesitate to affirm, that they distinctly prove three things: first, that the Bible is not your only rule of faith, even when you are unconscious of being under the direction of any other; secondly, that in discarding the venerable guidance of the Catholics, or, as your Presbyterian friend terms it, the idolatrous and Antichristian Church, you have only exchanged a stable and secure authority, for one less stable and secure: and thirdly, that while you deride and condemn the Papist rule, you cannot do well without it yourselves, but with an inconsistency that excites our ridicule or pity, you prefer the modern and usurped authority of a few heterodox teachers, in one small island, to the divine authority of the Universal Church. Regardless of your canting declamation and hypocritical clamour about Protestant liberty and Popish slavery, about the Bible on the one hand, and Antichrist on the other, a very little penetration discovers to us the real point of difference between us. It just amounts to this. Your teachers say: Hear us: follow us. Ours say, HEAR THE CHURCH. In the common affairs of life, when you want direc-