

And in like manner, if the Churches of Spain and Portugal, of Germany, and of Rome herself, were to return to their primitive simplicity and purity,—to that simplicity and purity which they possessed in the first centuries of Christianity,—to them also we could hold out the right hand of fellowship; and bid them “God speed in the name of the Lord.” But until this be the case, there can be no communion with them. They will continue to look upon us as “heretics,” and we must still consider them as fallen from the faith once delivered to the saints—as led by the commandments of men, rather than guided by the word of God.

The careful reader will not fail to remark that much stress has been laid, in this little treatise, on the fact, that the points of difference between us and the Church of Rome are innovations since the first three centuries of Christianity. It is acknowledged on all sides, that these were the purest ages of the Church, consequently those most free from error. Being nearer the age in which the inspired Apostles lived, the writers of those times were consequently more likely to know the minds of the Apostles. These, too, were ages of persecution,—times which tried men’s minds, and refined their hearts, as it were with fire. We, therefore, could hardly suppose, that men who saw death constantly hanging over them, would willingly hold and propagate error. But when Christianity ceased to be persecuted by Princes, but came to be patronized by them; when Bishops became temporal princes, and ecclesiastics rolled in wealth, and lived in luxury and indulgence, we find that error came in as a flood, and that truth veiled her diminished head, even in the Church of God. “Whatever is first, is true,” says Tertullian: “whatever is more recent, is spurious.”

We shall try by this test the points of difference between us and the Church of Rome.

Invocation of saints,* and worshipping of images,† were scarcely known at the end of the fourth century, and were

* Epiph. Adv. Hær. Lib. iii. hæ. 78.

† Ibid. Liber i. hæ. 27.