

Among the partisans and defenders of the primitive traditions you may also reckon Thorndike Collier, Bull, Samuel Parker, Bramhal, Dodwell, Waterland, &c.* In fine the antagonists and the avowed despiser of the holy fathers, Doctor Middleton, is disconsolate at finding so many admirers and disciples of them among the divines of the Church of England. "But though this doctrine of the sufficiency of the Scriptures, says he, be generally professed through all the reformed Churches yet it has happened, I know not how, in our own, that its divines have been apt on all occasions, to join the authority of the primitive church, to that of sacred writ, to supply doctrines from the ancient councils, on which the scriptures are either silent or thought defective; to add the holy fathers to the college of the apostles; and by ascribing the same gifts and powers to them both, (here the doctor is not correct) to raise the primitive traditions to an equality with apostolical precepts."†

*That I may not extend my citations too far, I shall content myself with adding the following names of their brethren:—

The archbishops Tillotson and Wake: bishops Bilson, Montague, Andrews, Potter, Cosins, Bramhal, Kall, Overal, Peploe, Patrick, and Forbes; the honorable M. Campbell, and Sir Edward Dering: Doctors Field, Hammond, Sherlock, Leslie, Cave, Chillingworth, Grabe, Bisse, Reeve, Knight, Hickes, Laurence, Wall, Brett; and Messrs. Bingham, Johnson, Griffith and Daille.

The passages from these authors will be found cited in the interesting work of Dr. Wix, reflections, &c. from page 40 to page 78, second edition, London, 1752.

†*Introductory Discourse*, p. 67, to a free inquiry into the miraculous powers, &c. by Conyers Middleton, principal librarian of the University of Cambridge, Edit. in 4to. London, 1752.

But what are we to say to this Dr. Middleton, who after having opened all the monuments of tradition, after having cast an inquisitive and penetrating eye into the writings of the holy fathers, feels himself all at once seized with a religious horror and shudders within himself? And what is it he has seen? Catholicism, good God! Catholicism in full perfection: He says it, he proves it: and instead of concluding that they had done wrong at the reformation, when they rose up against venerable dogmas and practices: instead of preferring the fathers nearest to the apostles, and their most faithful and holy imitators, before his irreligious and turbulent ancestors of the sixteenth century; this mad and whimsical genius immediately changes his colors, throws aside all tradition, and banishes the fathers far from him. He will have no more to do with them, because he cannot surrender himself up to the primitive Church without renouncing his dear and glorious reformation.

It had entered his head, and nothing in the world could make him put it out again; it had then forcibly entered his head, that the mass, its altars, its sacrifice, praying for the dead, and of course purgatory, the sign of the cross, the holy oils, the invocation of saints, and the honor paid to relics were superstitious and idolatrous dogmas and usages. He discovers them, however, from the time of the primitive ages; he frankly acknowledges it. Well then! these primitive and apostolical times shall no longer be considered by him but as idolatrous and superstitious ages; and according to him nothing less shall be required than all the lights & all the virtues of a Luther and a Calvin, to effect at length the disengagement of Christianity from its

From all that has been hitherto set forth in this letter, I think it clearly follows that revelation was at first taught entirely by the preaching of the apostles and disciples; that in the course of their ministry it was at different intervals and partially published in the inspired writings; and that thus it has been transmitted to the world in two manners, by word and by writing, that is to say, by tradition and by scripture, the twofold original and sacred deposit of the Christian doctrine: the one, first in point of time and long by itself, gathered together at first in the hearts and the memories of the faithful, then deposited by little and little and in detached pieces in the writings of the fathers and the acts of the councils; the other of later and gradual appearance, but fixed ligibly upon paper by the apostles or their disciples, a durable and divine monument, which will speak for ever to the eyes, as well as to the minds and hearts of all the faithful: the former, requiring a longer and more laborious research and being more difficult of discovery, because it is scattered and spread through a greater number of monuments, and is often found mixed up with many subjects, which, though not absolutely foreign to revelation, are nevertheless not it: the latter, full of an inspired and heavenly doctrine, but which is sometimes inaccessible in its sublimities, and like every written law, never being able, without an interpreter and judge, to make itself understood and

ancient rust, and from the stains of its origin.— Does not this savour of madness and blasphemy? Who would not be alarmed at the excesses to which even the best instructed might be driven, when once left to themselves and their prejudices?

I beg you will give yourself the satisfaction for a moment of comparing Dr. Middleton with bishop Croft. This latter, far from admiring the great lights so much boasted of in modern times on subjects of theology, is of opinion that the doctrine being more immediate at its source, it must be purer and more certain: the former, on the contrary, persuades himself, that scarcely had religion been promulgated when it became generally corrupted, to such a degree as to be unable to recover its original beauty until sixteen centuries after its divine founder. The one, seized with respect and love for the great models of virtue and knowledge presented to him in such abundance by the primitive Church, falls at the feet of venerable and holy antiquity; the other, sorely offended at some miraculous facts, or at some opinions which he found up and down the writings of the fathers and which no one obliged him to adopt, is not ashamed to sully their reputation with the imputation of wilful imposition and want of talent; he protests nevertheless that he recognizes them as valid witnesses, and yet in point of fact persists in denying the authority of their testimony. The bishop piously declares that he shall always lend them a respectful ear, and yet never does so: he remains deaf to their instructions, and in his vale of darkness he discovers not, in their writings, either the mass or sacrifice, or praying for the dead, or veneration for relics and images, or the invocation of saints, &c. The doctor, to make amends, although more deeply confined in the same dark vale, has seen, heard, and understood every thing, but takes good care not to believe any thing, or to bow to authority upon these articles.

Here certainly are two persons in whom learning abounds; and yet they agree none the better on that account. The truth is, that learning even misleads, if not engrafed upon fixed and invariable

principles. Never will you find an example similar to this amongst us, whilst you will behold a thousand of the kind amongst your teachers. And ought not this at length to conceive the prudent and moderate members of the reformed religion, that by leaving to each one the right of judging for himself, there will always be as great a diversity of opinions as in tastes, and that the wholesome restraint of authority is alone able to subdue the indelicacy, and the proud and capricious impetuosity of the human mind. *Daie frantum indomito animaliet impotenti naturæ.*

But if we are to believe all these fathers, said Middleton, we are at once necessarily drawn into popery. Give to the doctrine of the fathers whatever name you please: call it popery, if it suit you: is it not better, is it not safer to be a papist with the Austins, Jeromes, Ambroses, Hilarys, Chrysostoms, Basils, Cyrils, Athanasiuses, Cyprians, Justins, Tertullians, Ignatiuses, and Clements, with those apostolic men, those unexceptionable witnesses, who have astounded the world by their virtues, and by an heroic end, and who still edify us by their writings, than to continue in protestantism in the train of Luther, Calvin, Zuinglius, Beza, Knox, and Buchanan, or, if you please, of bishops Barlow, Scory, Coverdale, Hodgskin, Kitchen, &c. who have rendered their names famous, some by their audacity in violating the vow of their first engagements, others by their servile flexibility to the will of the existing powers, some by seditions, wars, and rivers of blood, all by a revolt against their mother Church, and not one of whom, to my knowledge, has yet been remarked for an humble and tender piety, for the mortification of their senses, the abnegation of themselves, or the austerity of their manners, or for an angelical and spiritual life. In truth is it lawful, or is it reasonable to balance between the two? And have I not myself to blush here to see myself constrained to tarnish the memory of these illustrious saints by so unworthy a comparison?

To be Continued.