

PREFACE.

THE Popish and Protestant controversy, in the present age, has, in these kingdoms, been agitated with ardor and ability. The debate, in the end of the last century, seemed to slumber. The polemics of each party, satisfied with the unrestricted enjoyment of their own opinions, appeared, for a time, to drop the pen of discussion, dismiss the weapons of hostility, and leave men, according to their several predilections, to the undisputed possession of Popery or Protestantism. But stillness frequently ushers in the tempest. The calm, amid the serenity of sea and sky, is often the harbinger of the storm. This diversity, in late years, has been exemplified in the controversial world. The polemical pen, which, in the British dominions, had slept in inactivity, has resumed its labors, and the clerical voice, which had been engaged in the sober delivery of sermons, has, in the passing day, been strained to the loud accents of controversial theology. Ireland, in a particular manner, has become the field of noisy disputation. The clergy, in advocacy of Popery or Protestantism, have displayed all their learning and eloquence. A society for promoting the principles of the Reformation has been established through England, Ireland, and Scotland; and this association has awakened a conflicting reaction, and blown into vivid combustion all the elements of papal opposition.

These discussions commenced with the Reformation. Contests of a similar kind, indeed, had preceded that revolution, and may be traced to the introduction of Christianity. The inspired heralds of the Gospel raised the voice, and wielded the pen against Judaism and infidelity. Popery carried on a perpetual war against Nestorianism, Monophysitism, and other oriental speculations. The papacy, in European nations, arrayed itself against Waldensianism; and opposed power and persecution to truth and reason. The inquisition erected the dungeon and the gibbet, for the support of error and superstition, and for the extinction of light and liberty. Wickliff and his followers in England wielded reason and revelation against superstition and persecution, till they were nearly exterminated by the sword, the flames and the gibbet.

Protestantism, at the era of the Reformation, began its attack on popery in more auspicious circumstances and on a wider