

The Catholic.

Quod semper; quod ubique; quod ab omnibus.

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AMICABLE DISCUSSION.

Continued.

LETTER VIII.

EXAMINATION OF TRADITION UPON THE EUCHARIST.

I have engaged myself, Sir, to justify the decrees of the Church upon the Eucharist, to shew you their conformity with the doctrine revealed by Jesus Christ and transmitted to us in the two-fold deposit of the scriptures and tradition. The first of these you have just been examining, and in it you must have discovered the principal dogmas, which the Church obliges us to believe. The second is now about to be laid open before your eyes, and in it you will see these same dogmas taught at all times, and indubitably deriving their origin from the preaching of the apostles. It is an immense field to pass over; but be not alarmed; the ages, with which above all it will be our business to become well acquainted, are the most ancient. We will confine ourselves to the six first: and by proceeding methodically, we shall avoid the confusion into which we should otherwise be thrown by the quantity, of monuments, facts, and passages, which will successively, present themselves; to us. We will begin by arranging them into classes, into general and particular proofs. The former will bring us acquainted with the tenets of all the Churches of the world at once; the latter will shew us the testimonies separately given by particular churches in its favour.

FIRST GENERAL PROOF DRAWN FROM THE DISCIPLINE OF SECRECY.

Every person who shall pay any attention to the history of the first ages of the Church will be struck with a point of discipline which I propose here to investigate with you, and which regards the inviolable secrecy observed by all the faithful on the sacraments, and especially on that of the altar. Jesus Christ gave it as a precept to his disciples, when he commanded them under figurative expressions not to give that which is holy to dogs, nor to cast pearls before swine. When he instituted his august sacrament, he would have none but his apostles for witnesses: and we see that after his example the apostles never celebrated but in secrecy. The scripture positively remarks, that they met daily in the temple, and there prolonged their prayers, but that they entered into the interior of some private house to participate of the body of the Lord for this undoubtedly is the signification of the

breaking of bread, in the style of the New testament: the first enigmatical expression upon the Eucharist that we meet with in antiquity; an expression moreover, which, while it was well comprehended by the christians, could not be understood by the unbelievers. I know that St. Paul has spoken more openly and I have myself quoted his words: but he was writing to the Corinthians: his letter was addressed and entrusted to the discretion of the clergy of this Church, who read only to the faithful those passages, which were forbidden to those who were not of the number of the faithful. We must say as much for the passage in which St. Ignatius, speaks with more clearness, of the Eucharist in his epistle to the inhabitants of Smyrna.

In ancient times the sacraments were designated under the general name of mysteries, which signifies things hidden. They were administered in private assemblies, after sending out all those who were not initiated. Until the time of the celebration it was permitted to the catechumens, the strangers, and even the unbelievers to remain. They assisted at the prayers, and the lessons that were read from the old testament by lectors, from the new by priests or deacons. They could moreover hear the explanation of the scripture, reserved to the bishops, sometimes but rarely, delegated by them to a priest. In these homilies or public explanations of the scripture, the preacher was exceedingly cautious not to speak of the mysteries, or if his subject obliged him to make allusion to them he did it with extreme reserve, covering the doctrine under enigmatical terms, that it might not be understood by the catechumens or the pagans. We do not speak clearly of the mysteries before the catechumens, said St. Cyril of Jerusalem: but we are often constrained to use obscure expressions, in order that, making ourselves well understood by the instructed faithful, those who are not so may not receive injury from it. St. Ambrose says also, "that if he had spoken of the sacraments it would have been, not to instruct them in them, but to make a discovery of them by a kind of treachery." Nothing is more common in St. Chrysostom than this manner of speaking; "The initiated alone know it: the mystics are instructed in it.—I would wish, says he again, to speak out clearly upon baptism; but I dare not on account of those who are not initiated. These persons make the explications of these things more difficult to us, by obliging us either to speak obscurely or to discover hidden things: and notwithstanding, I will explain myself as far as I possibly can, in covert and

veiled terms." In the other Fathers, particularly in St. Augustine, we frequently find concealments, phrases and sentences broken off and purposely obscured, on the subject of the Eucharist.

You see clearly, Sir, that this reserve never leaving them when they spoke in public, did not forsake them when they took the pen and composed works to confound heretics, pagans and jews. If they had divulged the secret in their writings, it would have been as ridiculous as useless to be so scrupulously careful & skillfully discreet in treating the subject in their sermons. Saint Cyril of Alexandria satisfies himself with answering to the objections of Julian the Apostate against Baptism, "that these mysteries are so profound, & so lofty, that they cannot be comprehended but by those who have faith: that therefore for fear, that by discovering the mysteries to the uninitiated, he should offend Jesus Christ, who forbids holy things to be given to dogs and pearls to be cast before swine, he will not undertake to treat of the more profound parts of them." And after having touched somewhat upon it, he adds "that he would say much more about it, were he not afraid of being understood by the uninitiated, because, says he, people generally ridicule what they do not understand, and ignorant persons, not even being aware of the weakness of their minds, condemn what they ought most to admire." Remark the reserve they imposed upon themselves in the works destined for the public. It is here expressly mentioned, as well as in other fathers: and we have always a right to suppose it, even when it is not announced in express terms. This habit of precaution and silence, so general in the primitive Church, continued up to the commencement of the fifth century, when we see that Innocent I replying even to a bishop who had consulted him, dares not to open himself in writing upon the mysterious part of the Eucharist. "As for the rest, says he, which it is not permitted me to write, we shall be able to speak of that by word of mouth, when you shall be here." Hear now in what manner the Abbe Fleury draws out in few words this discipline of secrecy with his usual accuracy and precision. It was customary to keep the sacraments concealed, not only from the unbelievers, but also from the catechumens: and they not only did not celebrate them in their presence, but they dared not even relate to them what passed in them, nor speak even of the nature of the sacrament. They wrote still less about them; and if, in a public discourse, or in a writing which might fall into profane hands, they were obliged to speak of the