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Quod semper; quod ubique; quod ab omnibus.

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Winter Evening Dialogue between John Hardman and John Cardwell, or THOUGHTS ON THE RULE OF FAITH, in a SERIES OF LETTERS, &c. &c. continued from p. 71.

LETTER IV.

1 Mr. Hardman's Reflections and Objections. 2 Delusion of Protestants. 3. Who do not follow the Bible alone. 4. But admit a Church Authority.

Gentlemen, Kirkham, April 25th 1817.

Mr. Cardwell's discourse made a deeper impression on my mind, than I was at first willing to avow. I could not help considering your writings as weak and untenable, and his arguments as sound and solid truths. At the same time, I felt with pain, that his remarks, though distinguished by sound sense, were quite at variance with all my preconceived notions and habits of thinking on the subject of religion. I opposed to him all those passages of your pamphlet which I thought best adapted to refute popery, and establish our religious tenets. To my surprise, I found that all my objections were as familiar to him, as his arguments were new to me. They neither excited his surprise by their novelty, nor shook his confidence by their weight, but received a prompt and satisfactory reply. As his discourse advanced, I could perceive my knowledge increase, and my prejudices vanish. What, said I to myself, are things really so? Are we Protestants the sport of artful teachers? Is Luther's glorious reformation to be classed with the heresies and schisms of ancient times; differing from them only in this, that whereas theirs were ancient reformations, ours is a modern one; theirs reached only to a few speculative points, whereas ours embraces so many new opinions? No wonder that, notwithstanding all our abuses and illiberality, the well-instructed Papist remains satisfied with the stability of his own faith, and feels little partiality or reverence for our ever changing and unsettled opinions. I found to my astonishment, that the Papists have surer grounds for their faith, than I had been aware of: that they love and respect the Bible at least as much as we do: but that their respect for the Bible makes them religiously fearful of profaning its sacredness by false or foolish interpretations, which are so common among us; and checking their curiosity, presumption and pride, teaches them the humility and wisdom to prefer the sense of the majority of Christians, to their own individual blunders and conceits. This is just as things should be. For the opinion of the majority of Christians all over the world, has a better chance of being right, than the opinion of a presumptuous individual. Surely, if this

be Popery, it is not so odious and absurd as we are taught to believe: but so far, at least, is innocent, rational, wise, and pious. Besides, if the Bible was not the original and primitive rule of faith, why should it be so now? Has Luther, or any other person ten times wiser and better than Luther, authority to introduce a change of so great moment, as to abolish the primitive rule of faith, which leads to unity, and to substitute a new one, which has caused, but cannot cure, so much disorderly discord and confusion? I am really of Mr. Cardwell's opinion, that to tell every blockhead to gather his religion from the Bible, is only giving a receipt how to make as many religions, as there are bungling expositors of the Holy Scripture.—It cannot be denied that private judgment, blundering over the Bible, has, since the reformation, produced at least a hundred different religions in this island alone. Now as true religion is one, ninety nine of these new biblical religions must be false. It is equally undeniable, that the Roman Catholic Church is the most ancient and most numerous of all others. It professes never to change, or to have changed its faith, from the time of the Apostles. Its very name is Catholic, not Protestant. Its communion shows men and women of the most exemplary piety, and claims all the ancient saints, even all those of our own calendar, save one. It is acknowledged by some of the best and wisest Protestant divines, both at home and abroad, to be a true Church. This is seriously denied by none but fools and fanatics. If then we speak without prejudice and passion, ought we not to admit, that there is a great appearance of truth in what Mr. Sherburn told one of our clergymen the other day, that there are ninety-nine chances to one, that the very best of the new biblical religions is false; and ninety-nine chances in a hundred, that his ancient Church is the true one. Truly this is as plain as an operation in the Rule of the Three. But if it be true, that the noisy professions of our divines about following the Bible alone, be all a joke; if it be true, that while they profess to be guided by it, they artfully make it say what they please; and most of all, if it be true, that their interpretations are influenced by human authority, at the very moment when they disclaim all deference to any authority but that of the Bible, then we are dupes the play-things of artful or deluded teachers. We in fact admit an authority, which in words we disavow; and in practice are necessitated to follow a popish rule, without either its plausibility, its consistency, or security. There appears to be some anomaly in this; something that shuns the light. If we must follow authority, why not follow the

authority of the most ancient, the most numerous and most consistent body of Christians in the world? There is something wrong here. Is it, that the doctrines which I have been taught are too new, and that our faith is not quite as sound as it should be?

Such, Gentlemen, was the frame of mind in which I began to consider the main controversy between the ancient Church and the modern one: But keeping these reflections to myself, and desirous of hearing what further observations Mr. Cardwell had to offer, I again had recourse to your pamphlet, and with diminished confidence in my auxiliary, returned to the charge. Some of your twelve propositions, said I to Mr. Cardwell, are sensible and just; but others appear to stand in need of proof. Pardon me if I cannot admit the fourth proposition, which says, that "the Scripture has never yet been the only rule of any man's belief;" since it is the sole rule of Protestants, Presbyterians, Calvinists, Methodists, Anabaptists, Unitarians, and all sorts of dissenters:—nor the fifth which tells us that "those who own no other rule but plain Scripture, disallow a free and unbiassed study of the Holy Scripture; since we all subscribe to the Bible Society, whose object is to furnish every man, woman, and child, with the bible, without note or comment:"—nor to the seventh, which asserts, that "to call the Scripture alone the rule of faith, is only a genteel way of appealing to a man's own judgment." I consider this assertion as nearer akin to the language of party, than of truth.

2. Mr. Cardwell smiled at my objections. Dr. Hawarden's twelve propositions, said he, are so many axioms of truth. They have been established in the most satisfactory manner, both by that learned author, and many other Catholic writers. To prove each of them separately, would be a very easy matter. It would require only the trouble of reading his 'Rule of Faith truly stated.' Conviction would be the result of its perusal. As you desire further information on these points, I will lend you the book, which you may read at your leisure. I know indeed that Protestants, though they are ever talking of unlimited freedom of inquiry, seldom look into a popish book. They commonly start from it, as they would from prison or infection. In this they resemble certain ancient bigots, who stopped all enquiry by this disdainful question: "What good can come from Nazareth?" For this reason they are commonly better acquainted with the paganism of China or Hindostan, than with the doctrines of Catholicity. This aversion