

The Catholic.

Quod semper; quod ubique; quod ab omnibus.

VOL. I.

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NO. 21.

SELECTED.

The first Letter of the *Winter Evening's Dialogues*, having during our absence, been omitted by mistake; we think it too interesting not to give it in our present number. It should have preceded the one given in our No. 10.

Winter Evening Dialogue between John Hardman and John Cardwell, or THOUGHTS ON THE RULE OF FAITH, in a SERIES OF LETTERS, addressed to the Authors of "Letters to the Clergy of the Catholic Church, and more especially to the Rev. Thomas Sherburn, of Kirkham, in Lancashire," By John Hardman.

LETTERS.

1. Introduction. 2. The Authors not Catholics. 3. Tendency of Protestant Principles. 4. General remarks on the Performance.

Gentlemen, *Kirkham, 26th January 1813.*

1. You are truly a pretty pair of brothers, thus to sport with the credulity of your readers. Giving you ample credit for the apparent sincerity and apparent piety of your professions, and taking you to be what you pretend to be, two Catholics, who by searching the Scriptures, had discovered the errors of the Catholic doctrine, I felt an unusual joy, proportioned to the novelty of the cause. Within the limited sphere of my own observation and memory, I have known many Protestants, who by reading the Bible with diligence, and listening to the sermons of preachers first of one sect then of another, have become successively Churchmen, Methodists, Anabaptists, Presbyterians, and so forth: some of my neighbours, who like myself were educated churchmen, have been successively members of all these different religions. But while we see daily instances of this experimental zeal, and daily admire the diligence of research, which the desire of salvation inspires in the breasts of Protestants of every description, it has always appeared to me a singular and unaccountable fact, that a Papist is never converted. He loves his faith with obstinate attachment; and if he does ever forsake it, his motives are generally as obvious, as his sincerity is questionable; and in most instances that have come within my knowledge, he soon becomes the disgrace of our communion, as he is an outcast or apostate from his own. This disedifying result most commonly mars the triumph of a Papist's conversion. I therefore learned with pleasure from your recent publication, that the sincerity of your conversion was likely to redeem this scandal. I rejoiced to find that two ingenuous young men, who had been diligently brought up in the religion of Popery, had, by a diligent and conscientious perusal of the Holy Bible, been blessed with light to discover their errors, and with grace to renounce

them; and I praised the Lord, for having, by the marvellous light of his word, withdrawn you from the darkness and bondage of Popery, into the light and liberty of the children of God.

Pleased with this discovery, I read over and over again your book entitled, "The Claims of the Catholic Church to be regarded as the true Church of Christ, briefly investigated; in a Series of Letters addressed to the Clergy of the Catholic church and more especially to the Rev. Thomas Sherburn of Kirkham, in Lancashire." I made myself master of all the arguments by which you combat the errors of Popery. I was at the pains to verify, in our great Family Bible, all the references which you make to Scripture without quoting the text. Thus instructed by your discoveries, and emboldened by the triumph of your conversion, now thinks I to myself; I know all the weak parts of Popery, now I can refute any Papist; I am now a match for Mr. Cardwell.

Mr. Cardwell, you know, is my friend and neighbour. His farm lies near my own. We have always lived together on good terms, and in a mutual intercourse of friendly offices. He is a kind neighbour, a faithful friend, an upright, sober, benevolent and good man. Having been blessed with the advantages of a good education, he amuses his leisure hours with reading, and has the reputation of being almost as learned as a priest. But notwithstanding all these good qualities he is a stiff Papist, and so religious in his way, that he has been heard to say, that he would not change his religion even if the King would make him Lord Lieutenant of the country. Though Mr. Cardwell is not forward to begin disputes about religion, he is always ready to defend his own, when it is attacked. Several of our neighbours and some preachers have at times been silenced by his arguments.

Said I to myself, I will visit my friend, and spend this long winter evening in his company, I will show him this new pamphlet; I mean your "Series of Letters," &c. It will serve to introduce a discussion on religious topics. I have no hope of converting him; but as I love a little fun in my heart, and have qualified myself, by reading this book, to hold an argument with him, I will see what he has to say for himself. I went accordingly and found my friend occupied with a book in his hand. Two or three others were lying on the table. He laid down his book, and received me with his wonted civility and kindness. After the usual compliments, and some observations on the badness of the times, the lateness of the harvest, and the extraordinary severity of the season, I took your book out of my pocket, and asked him whe-

ther he had seen it. He told me that he had. After the best preface that I could make, I asked him with a tone of triumph, whether he was not now convinced that the Church of Rome was unscriptural, erroneous, corrupt, and antichristian; whether Babylon was not at last fallen, or at least falling, since two of the sons of the scarlet w— had, by the aid of their own reason, and the light of the Holy Scriptures, discovered and denounced the abominations of their mother? This question led us into a long and interesting conversation on a variety of topics connected with your pamphlet. It is always gratifying to an author, to know what kind of reception his work meets with among readers of different descriptions. Of this conversation, therefore, it is my intention to give you a detail, as ample as my memory will enable me to give it, in this and my following letters.

2. To my first question, Mr. Cardwell replied by proposing another. With a look of earnestness mixed with good nature he asked me whether I really supposed that your book was the production of a Catholic pen. I answered without hesitation that I did: and that I considered your arguments against Popery as new, convincing, and unanswerable, I was not conscious that I was labouring under any delusion, or exciting his ridicule; but I flattered myself, that this bold and decisive tone would give me an advantage, and disconcert my friend. Judge then, how great was my surprise and chagrin, when he replied with a smile.

Mr. Hardman, I admire your simplicity in taking these writers to be Catholics. They are no Catholics, but Protestants who have hoaxed you. They have laid a baited hook for the avidity of your religious prejudices, and I am sorry to see you among the gudgeons who can swallow and digest it. If these authors pretend to put on the mantle of Catholicism, it is manifestly a suit that does not fit them. Their pretending to be Catholics is an obsolete and flimsy artifice, supported it seems, with sufficient art and ability to impose on your credulity: but it is an artifice sufficiently obvious to the penetration of the simplest Catholic. They begin with a sanctimonious air of moderation and candour, but soon dropping the visor, and forgetting the assumed character which they had borrowed to serve a turn, they misrepresent our doctrine perpetually: they slander our church and vilify our persons, with all the malignity of vulgar scurrility. It is clear that they have never learned our catechism, nor have been instructed in our doctrine. They know it only as it is disguised and caricatured in the misrepresentations of our enemies. Hence, like many other Protestant controvertists possess