

General Intelligence.

UNITED STATES.

To the Editor of the *Freeman's Journal and Catholic Register*:
DR. HUGHES ON KERWAN'S LETTERS.

DEAR SIR:—I see a certain work announced, and much landed in several of the newspapers, entitled 'Kirwan's Letters to Bishop Hughes.' I have not read these letters though I have twice attempted to do so. Why they were addressed to me, I cannot comprehend. It is said by some who probably know and care as little about the matter as I do, that the author of 'Kirwan's Letters to Bishop Hughes' is a certain Mr Mc Murray, a Presbyterian clergyman of Elizabethtown, New Jersey. It is of little consequence whether this be so or not.—The writer proclaims himself a countryman of mine and from intrinsic evidences, which a glance at his letters is sufficient to furnish, I fear his statement in his behalf is but too true.—He must charge it to a lingering affection for Old Ireland, our common mother, if I take the liberty of saying that I would rather he had been anybody else's countryman. But there is no remedy. Ireland happily, has but few such sons as he, and over what she would regard as their ingratitude there is left to her but the melancholy privilege of shedding a mother's tears for the waywardness, in this instance of a remote and erring child. In the ingenuous sophistry of maternal affection, she would, no doubt, frame excuses for him, in that he withdrew his young limbs from those chains that have been riveted on hers for centuries—in that her misfortunes caused him to be snatched from her bosom, and consigned to foreign matrons who albeit most charitably disposed towards the boy, loved not his mother. In the charity of affection she could forgive him all that might be attributable to the mere accidents of his youth, but her heart would feel an additional pang if she were to know that any son of her's, far beyond the western horizon that bounds her vision, could be so untrue to her and to himself as in the maturity of his years to make a boast of his apostacy and rejoice in the calamities of his childhood.

Of myself, so far as I have been able to read him, Kirwan has spoken in terms of personal respect. He professes to regard me as a man of talents, of whom even Ireland need not be ashamed. He has no sympathy with those men who a few years ago, attempted to bear me down by the rudeness of their assault. In all this Kirwan does honor to himself; but when on the other hand, in order to damage the Church he has forsaken, he imputes to me a want of sincerity in my belief and profession of the Catholic faith, he does great injustice to the generous instinct of his Irish nature—and betrays only the bad effect of his Presbyterian training. The insinuation is, that being a man of talents like himself, I must see the pretended errors of the Catholic Church, as he does, that I have a public part to sustain, and that I sustain it irrespective of the better light which he supposes I must have, as a private individual. This is a very injurious imputation. It destroys in my mind, the value of any courtesy which he may have intended to use towards me personally.

I know not by what right Kirwan could have indulged in this strange speculation: but it suggests to me an idea which may or may not, be founded. We all know that Atheists, for instance, seem impelled by some paramount interior law of their being, to speak of religion as if it were no concern of theirs. We know that those who have renounced the Catholic

faith seem governed by the same law, in reference to the communion which they have forsaken, and a little insight of the human heart, confirmed by the testimony of persons who have gone through the melancholy experience, will sufficiently account for what would otherwise seem inexplicable. The Protestant who enters the Church, by the increase of his belief, fills up a void in his heart, and is afterwards more engaged with the fulness of faith which he has received, than with the vacuity which he left behind. But when the transition is in the other direction, as in Kirwan's case, the mind becomes engaged in the unnatural attempt to expel from itself the substance of faith and to satisfy itself, instead, with the emptiness of negative belief. Such minds, in spite of their efforts, must live, in a certain sense, on the old stock of their religious convictions, even by combatting what they cannot altogether destroy.

Our Protestant friends have rejoiced abundantly in the occasional fall of some unhappy priest of our communion. These were generally unfortunate men before their transition, and after struggling by a process such as we have referred to, for years, we find many of them returning again, and with tears acknowledging that their apostacy was but the act of passion—that they did not disbelieve the Church, but were angry with her—that their writing against her had a double object, to gratify their resentment, and if possible to wear out the convictions of her teachings, from their troubled breasts. Whether Kirwan's case is analogous it is not for me to say. But, at all events I protest against his applying to me any unworthy test with which his own consciousness of motives may, or may not, have made him familiar.

The object of Kirwan's letters is to show the reasons why he left the Catholic Church, and the reasons why he cannot return. Certainly he is at liberty to write on any subject, and give his reasons, although the public never asked for them, so far as I know; nor is it to Catholics especially, of the least importance whether he return or not. He would not have been missed, and even if he had, the Church has been amply compensated, in the accession of very numerous and distinguished Protestant clergymen, both in Europe and America. For his own sake alone has the question of his leaving or returning, any, the smallest consequence. Yet his letters appear to have attracted some attention, which is to be ascribed not to any novelty in the pretended argument, but to a certain sprightliness of style in assailing the doctrines of the Catholic Church, which renders them a pleasing contrast to the filthy volumes that have been written on the same side and on the same subject. It is even said that the writer has secured for them a portion of public attention by the fact of publishing the name of Bishop Hughes and concealing the name of the writer. Be all this as it may, they have attracted some notice, and it is not unreasonable to suppose that many Protestants who have read them would be disposed to hear what might be said on the other side of the question. Under this view of the case, I propose to publish a series of letters in your Journal, on the same great topics which Kirwan has discussed,—and whereas he has published reasons for having left the Catholic Church, and for refusing to return, the object of my letters will be to show that no Catholic ought to forsake his Church, and that all Protestants who have a zeal for their salvation ought to enter her communion with as little delay as possible. This being the object of my letters, it will be quite unnecessary for me to refer to the language, or the