

The Catholic.

Quod semper; quod ubique; quod ab omnibus

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AMICABLE DISCUSSION.

Continued.

LETTER IV.

ON THE AUTHORITY OF TRADITION.

THE reformed religion would never have thought of erecting as a principle that the scripture alone decides every essential point, if it had recollected this decisive and unanswerable example, and if it had not lost sight of the ancient maxim, to which St. Augustine so often recurs: that we must consider as an institution of the apostles whatever we find to be generally believed and observed in the Churches without being able to discover its origin and commencement.

And if it had had before its eyes this doctrine of the first ages, set down by Vincent of Lerins, in these terms: "We must be particularly careful to hold fast that doctrine, which has been believed in all places, at all times and by all. For as the word (catholic) itself plainly denotes, there is nothing truly and properly catholic, but that which comprehends all in general. Now it will be so, if we follow universality, antiquity, and unanimous consent. We shall follow *universality*, if we believe that doctrine alone to be true, which the Church every where admits. We shall follow *antiquity*, if we depart not from the opinions which our ancestors and fathers openly maintained. We shall follow *unanimous consent*, if we adhere to the sentiments of all, or of almost all, our pastors and teachers." And if it would have taken advice from St. John Chrysostom, who, commenting on the famous passage of St. Paul to the Thessalonians, expresses himself as follows:—"Hence it is plain, that all things were not delivered in writing, but many otherwise; and are equally worthy to be believed. Wherefore let us hold fast to the traditions of the Church. It is tradition; let this suffice." And of St. Basil on the same passage: "Among the points of belief and practice in the Church, some were delivered in writing, while others were received by apostolic tradition in mystery, that is, in a hidden manner: but both have equal authority as far as piety is concerned; nor are they opposed by any one who is but slightly versed in ecclesiastical rites. For if we attempt to reject, as matters of little moment, such points as were not written, we shall, by our imprudence, offer a signal injury to the gospel." And again of St. Epiphanius who proves the necessity of tradition. "We must look to tradition, says he, for all things cannot be gathered from scriptures. For which reason the

holy apostles left some things in writing, and others not."

And if it had observed, what particularly merits observation from its singularity, our very question proposed in express terms by a celebrated writer of the second century and decided as follows: "But you say, (writes Tertullian) even in speaking of tradition, some written authority is necessary.— Let us then enquire whether no tradition should be admitted, unless it be written." (This is precisely the objection laid claim to by the reformed religion, attend to its refutation.) "I will allow, that it should not, if no examples of other practices can be adduced, which we maintain on the sole title of tradition, and the strength of custom, without the smallest written authority. To begin with baptism; when on the point of entering the water, we protest, in the Church and under the hands of the bishops, that we renounce the devil, and his pomps and his angels: after this, we are immersed three separate times, replying something more than our Saviour presented in the gospel. Leaving the water we take a mixture of milk and honey; and from this time, for the space of a week, we refrain from the daily bath. The sacrament of the Eucharist, instituted by the Lord, at the time of the repast and for all, we take in our assemblies before day, and only from the hand of him who presides. We offer for the dead; we annually celebrate the birth of the martyrs —." The day of their death is the day of their birth to immortality) "Of these and other usages if you ask for the written authority of the scriptures, none will be found. They spring from tradition, which practice has confirmed and obedience ratified."

The day would not suffice, to adopt the expression of St. Basil, were I to attempt to describe to

"The day would not be sufficient, were I to attempt to relate to you all the mysteries transmitted to the Church without writing. To omit others, from what writing have we this profession of faith in God; the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost (the apostles creed)?" He had said before: "Which of the saints have left us in writing the words of invocation in the consecration of the eucharistic bread and chalice? For we do not confine ourselves to those which the gospel and the apostle mention: we make additions before and after, as being of great importance to the mystery, and which are come down to us by an unwritten tradition." And again, the following remarkable words occur in the same passage: "The apostles and the fathers, who have from the beginning, prescribed certain rites to the Church, knew how to preserve for mysteries their becoming dignity, by the secrecy and silence in which it kept them enveloped. For what is thrown open to the ear and the gaze of the people, is no longer absolutely mysterious. For this reason have many things been transmitted to us

you all that the fathers have said on the subject of tradition. I am not surprised that they so frequently insist upon it: they were but two or three degrees from the origin of the Church: they had a near view of the means and regulations that had tended to aggrandize and extend it: they held in mind that the apostles, entirely occupied in the ministry of the word, had rarely taken up the pen, and only from accident and necessity; that their preaching had been daily and abundant, their writing accidental and short; that supposing the ground of the doctrine to be in their writings, the development of it could not be found there also; that for the detail they must always have recourse to their verbal explanations; that, even on their mysteries and dogmas, they had in their works designly thrown a certain veil of obscurity to prevent the profane from having access to them, whilst in the midst of the faithful and their friends, they expressed themselves openly and without restraint, in fine that they never committed to writing the words and prayers with which they accompanied the celebration of the mysteries. These sacred and often essential forms were deposited in the hearts and the memory, and transmitted from mouth to mouth more securely in secret. After the example of their masters, the apostolic fathers wrote little: they also had their time taken up in active employment, rather than in composing works: and when they took up their pen it was scarcely ever for any other reason than to make known to strangers, what they had heard preached by the apostles. Day by day did they repeat it round about them to their audience, and occasionally communicated it at a distance by writing. In this manner, in the Churches where the apostles had preached, their doctrine was preserved by the succession of disciples to the apostles, of hearers of the disciples to these same disciples, and thus from one to another. As for those from without, it reached them by means of communications carried on from one Church to another: a steady and active correspondance attested and propagated through the world the instructions derived from the apostles and Jesus Christ,

without writing, lest the vulgar, becoming too much familiarized with our dogmas, should pass from familiarity to contempt. The dogma is one thing, and preaching another. Dogmas require to be kept silent—preaching, to be public. There is, moreover, another kind of silence, that of obscurity in which the scripture purposely conceals itself to render the dogmas more difficult to be comprehended." And now, Sir, draw your conclusion, what this learned bishop of Cesarea would have thought of your reformation, that pretends to take every thing from scripture and nothing from tradition.