

was long-suffering. He bore with us (saying), Himself bore our iniquities. He gave up His own Son a Ransom for us, the Holy for the lawless, the Sinless for sinners, the Just for the unjust, the Incorruptible for the corrupt, the Immortal for mortals. For what else but His righteousness could cover our sins? Wherein could we lawless and impious ones be justified, but in the Son of God alone? O sweet exchange, O inscrutable working, O unhoped-for blessings. That the iniquity of many should be hidden in One righteous man, and that the righteousness of One should justify many lawless ones. In the foregoing time, then, He convinced us that our nature could not attain life, but now He revealed the Saviour, able to save even the helpless, by both of which He willed us to trust in His goodness, to regard Him as our Nourisher, Father, Teacher, Counsellor, Physician, Wisdom, Light, Honour, Glory, Strength, and Life, that we should not be anxious about clothing and food.

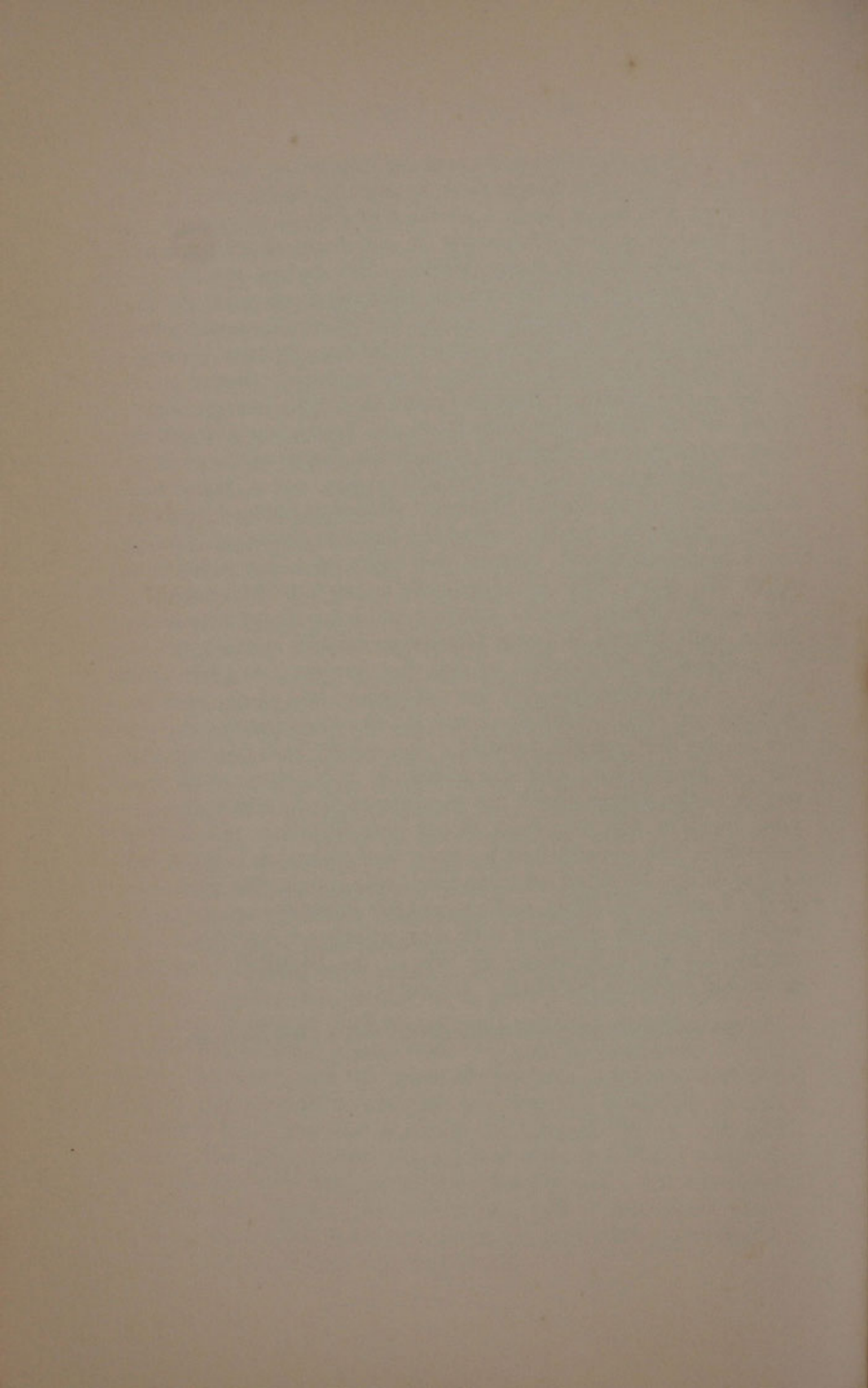
10. And if thou desirest this faith and receivest it, first of all (thou shalt receive) the knowledge (of the Father). For God loved mankind, for whose sake He made the world, to whom He subdued all things therein, to whom He gave reason and understanding, whom alone He permitted to look towards Him, whom He formed in His own image, to whom He sent His Only begotten Son, to whom He promised a kingdom in Heaven, and will give it to those who loved Him. And having known this, with what joy wilt thou expect to be filled? Or how wilt thou love Him who has first so loved thee? and when thou hast loved Him thou wilt be an imitator of His goodness. And do not wonder that man can be an imitator of God. It is possible, if He wills it. For it is not by exercising lordship over his neighbours, or by desiring to be greater than those that are weaker, or by being rich and oppressing those that are poorer, that happiness comes: nor can any one in these things become an imitator of God; but these things are all foreign to His greatness. But whosoever bears his neighbour's burden; who wherein he abounds is willing to benefit another who is in want; who, whatsoever he has, having received it from God, by supplying it to those that are in need, is as a god of those who receive his gifts: he is an imitator of God. Then thou shalt see, while yet on the earth, that God rules from the Heavens; then thou shalt

begin to speak the mysteries of God ; then thou wilt both love and admire those that are persecuted for refusing to deny God ; then thou wilt condemn the deceit and error of the world, when thou wilt know to live truly in Heaven. When thou wilt despise that which is here esteemed death, when thou hast been afraid of that which is really death, which is reserved for those who shall have been condemned to the eternal fire, which shall torment for ever those that are committed to it. Then shalt thou admire those who for righteousness sake endured the (earthly) fire. Thou shalt esteem them blessed, when thou hast become conscious of that fire.

II. I am not treating of strange things, nor do I seek out things contrary to reason, but as I was a disciple of the apostles, I am a teacher of the Gentiles. I minister that which was delivered to me, to those that are learners worthy of the truth. For who after being instructed, and born again in the beloved Word, does not seek to learn carefully the things which have been clearly shown through the Word to the disciples, to whom the Word being manifested has revealed them, speaking freely, not understood by unbelieving men, but narrating in full to the disciples? Who being esteemed faithful by Him, were entrusted with the knowledge of the mysteries of the Father ; on which account He sent the Word, that He might be made known in the world ; Who was despised by His people, preached by apostles, believed on by the Gentiles. He was from the beginning, who appeared as if recent, and was found in time, and is ever born afresh in the hearts of His saints. He is from everlasting, and to-day is called a son ; through Whom the Church is made rich, and grace abounding is plenteous among the saints, granting understanding, revealing mysteries, announcing seasons, rejoicing over the faithful, vouchsafed as a gift to those that seek, in whom the bounds of faith are not transgressed, nor the bounds fixed by the Fathers passed over. Then the reverence of the law is celebrated, and the grace of prophets is known, and the faith of the gospels is established, and the tradition of the apostles is kept, and the grace of the Church exults. In not grieving this grace, thou shalt know what the Word teaches, by whom He wills and when He thinks good. For whatever things we are impelled to utter by the will of the Word commanding us, we communicate them to you with painfulness, from love of the things revealed to us.

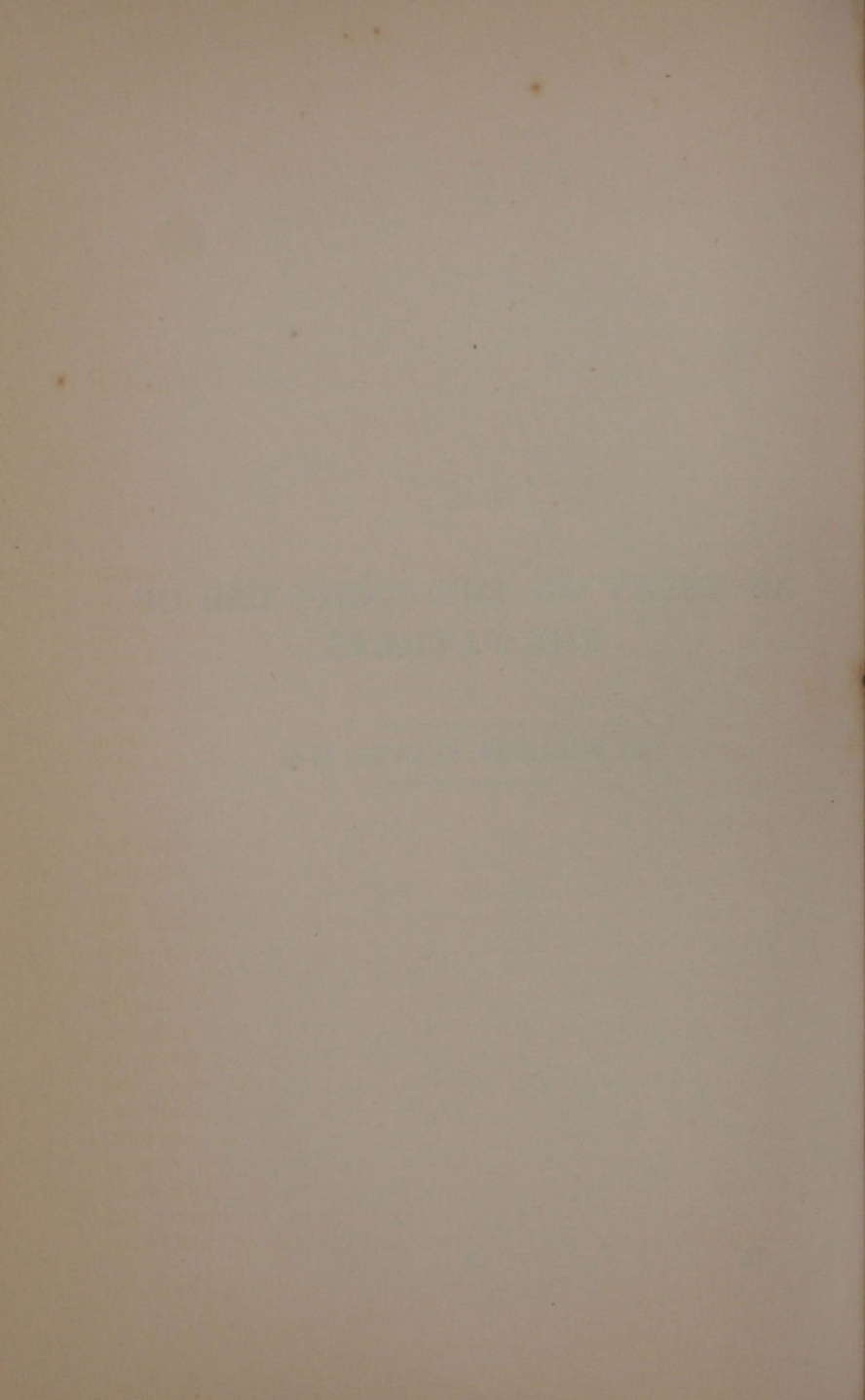
12. Having received and carefully listened to which things you shall know what things God bestows on those that rightly love Him, you being made a paradise of delight bringing forth in yourselves a tree flourishing in all manner of produce, adorned with fruit of many kinds. For in this ground the tree of knowledge and the tree of life have been planted; the tree of knowledge does not destroy, but disobedience destroys. For neither are those words which have been written of uncertain meaning, how that God from the beginning planted a tree of life in the midst of Paradise, revealing life through knowledge, which those who were from the beginning not having used honestly, were deprived of it by the deceit of the serpent. For neither is there life without knowledge, nor is knowledge secure without true life. Therefore each was planted near the other. And the apostle, seeing the force of this, and blaming the knowledge which without the truth of a command acts upon life, says, "Knowledge puffeth up, but love edifieth." For he who thinks that he knows anything without true knowledge, and such as is borne witness to by life, knows nothing, is deceived by the serpent, as one that has not loved life. But he who has knowledge with fear and seeks life, plants in hope, looking for fruit. Let thy heart be thy knowledge; and let thy life be true reason, inwardly possessed; and bearing this tree of knowledge, and exhibiting its fruit, thou shalt ever gather in the things which are pleasing to God; which the serpent touches not, nor does deceit meddle with: nor is Eve corrupted, but is trusted as a virgin, and salvation is revealed, and apostles are filled with understanding, and the Passover of the Lord goeth forth, and choirs¹ (or churches) are gathered together, and are arranged with due order, and the Word who teaches the saints rejoices; by Whom the Father is glorified, to Whom be glory for ever. Amen."

¹ *χοροι* according to some conjectures. *κλη̅ροι* (Wordsworth).



AN ESSAY ON THE RIGHT USE OF
THE FATHERS.

By WILLIAM REEVES, M.A.



AN ESSAY ON THE RIGHT USE OF THE FATHERS.

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[THE writer of the following Essay was Rector of Cranford, in Middlesex, and published it in 1709 as a Preface to the Apologies of Justin Martyr, Tertullian, and Minutius Felix, with a dedication to Robert Nelson. It is interesting to note that this dedication appeared in the same year that the saintly Nonjuror, on the advice of his friend Kerr, returned to the Communion of the Established Church. The following extract from the dedication gives the reason for the publication.]

GIVE me leave to remind you, Sir, who it was that proposed the undertaking, and encouraged it to the end. You gave me the confidence to believe, that by a work of this nature I might do some service to the Christian Faith, and the Christian morals, when some moderns were doing their best to reform us out of both. You thought that men long engaged in the fashions and vices of the age, and who had gods for their turn, would be extremely inquisitive and well satisfied, before they parted with every thing in hand, for something in reversion; and that such a sudden deadness to this world, and so lively a passion for the next, such strictness of discipline, and purity of manners, that amazing magnanimity, patience, and loyalty under the most provoking injuries, that strange spirit of humility, meekness, and universal charity, which make up a great part of these Apologies, are so expressive and beautiful a scene of the powers of true religion, and have

kindled such pure fires, and gentle passions in your own breast, that you were of opinion, whoever read and compared them with the present reverse of things, must needs be very far gone not to be affected with the comparison, and to be so far touched at least, as to admire what he will not practise.

But above all, the many bold appeals here recorded, the triumphant challenges to emperor and senate, to put the truth of the Christian religion upon this issue: that if they would bring any one of those false prophets, that passed for inspired, to their tribunals, and if any ordinary Christian did not in the name of Jesus cast out the evil spirit, and put the prophet to silence; and not only so, but if he did not force Æsculapius, Apollo, or any of those dæmons they worshipped for gods, forthwith to quit their possessions with fear and trembling and gnashing of teeth, and proclaim themselves devils in the presence of their worshippers, and if he failed in any one instance, the Christians desired no mercy, but to be looked upon as cheats, and were willing to be proceeded against with the utmost contempt and cruelty imaginable. This, I say, was so public and sensible a proof, so level to the lowest understandings, so daring and demonstrative of a good cause and a good conscience, that you judged it highly reasonable for the less knowing people to be better acquainted with it; and I believe nothing can be found more miraculous and astonishing in all Christian antiquity.

The devil, who in Scripture is styled the Prince, and the God of this world, had reigned as such above two thousand years; upon the coming of Christ, the Oracles of a sudden in a great measure were all struck dumb; the philosophers presently, and men of parts, set their heads to work about the causes of this strange universal silence; some assign one cause, and some another, and some lay it upon the Christians themselves. St John declares, "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil;" the unclean spirits own Him to be Jesus of Nazareth, the Holy One of God, and beseech Him not to destroy them. "The seventy returned with joy, saying, Lord: even the devils are subject unto us through Thy name." After His resurrection, when He sent out His apostles to preach the gospel, He particularly promised the power over evil spirits both to them and their followers; "And these signs shall follow them

that believe ; in My name they shall cast out devils," &c. And with what exultation, triumph, and assurance, the primitive Christians appealed to this power over the heathen gods upon all occasions, is sufficiently evident from these Apologies ; and the casting out the Prince of this world, being the end of Christ's coming into the world ; and the most plain, proper, and convincing argument that all the gods of the nations were devils, being to prove it by their own confession : this astonishing power lasted longest in the Church, and was a standing miracle for several hundred years together, till the kingdom of darkness was destroyed, and the Christian religion became the joy of the whole earth. And was ever argument like this, both for the being of a God, and the truth of the gospel.

But though Christ is said to come on *purpose to destroy the works of the devil*, though He did it effectually to the conviction of the heathen world by a continued miracle, unquestionably of above three hundred years' standing, (yet if we may believe some men) all this devil-craft was nothing more than pure priest-craft only ; a bewitching name, that in some measure supplies the place of the devil, and does his business to a wonder ; for priest-craft is an answer to every thing, a charm against all the force both of reason and revelation. Surely these priests, if they were men, were very strange ones, and as active, bloody and cunning, as we can possibly imagine devils to be. But while these men tax others with credulity and easiness, for believing a matter of fact attested by the general consent of all historians both profane and sacred, what a train of incredibilities do they (poor wretches !) with a seeming complacency believe themselves ? They believe against Moses and the Prophets, Christ and His Apostles, and all the primitive fathers ; and what they say were acted by devils, they affirm to be acted by men. They believe that these priests, were a superior order of jugglers, who for two thousand years could successfully impose upon mankind in all the distant places of the earth, that they could make the whole world dance constant attendance to their temples and oracles, at the expense of numerous, costly, and impertinent ceremonies ; and persuade nations to leave their country ; and kings, and princes, as well as people, in spite of all the reluctances of nature, to sacrifice their sons and their

daughters without a murmur, and think it meritorious so to do ; they believe, likewise, that all these priests successively were so much the same, so stanch in blood and secrecy, that in this vast tract of time none could find in their heart to relent, and betray the imposture ; that this their craft was above the reach of emperors, statesmen, and the wisest philosophers in the wisest ages ; that is, all the world, beside the priests, all this time were perfectly besotted. And yet our sceptics find that these active, bloody, cunning priests, were of a sudden put all to silence, shame and confusion, they find all the demoniacs cured, and all this effected by the most contemptible sect of men living, and merely by the name of Jesus, or the sign of His passion, and that this was the great instrument in converting the pagan world. Let not such men, therefore, especially charge others with credulity, who can readily swallow these and many more monstrous absurdities, that attend the believing the ancient Oracles and possessions to have been pure priest-craft only ; but the true reasons why these unbelievers are so fond of laying all this load of craft upon the priests, are, because they would insinuate priests of all religions to be the same, and because the notion of devils raises some ideas that give them pain. They can do pretty well with religion upon speculative principles, but when we come with a proof from the confession of tormented spirits, this is so sensible an argument, and galls so violently, that they cannot forbear wincing and being uneasy ; and then they must mend, or cry out, "All is priest-craft." And this being the argument these Apologies abound with, you thought it reasonable they should be made English.

I am very sensible, that the time I have been now spending upon these reasons, I have been transgressing against the mode of epistolary dedications, which are usually laid out all upon the persons they are addressed to, upon their family, their fortune, or something else that is not truly theirs ; and so strongly perfumed, that they overcome the perception of what would otherwise offend. But I must tell you, Sir, that these were your own reasons for my entering upon these translations ; and did they but come abroad in that irresistible language they came to me from your own mouth, I should not question their good success upon others, as well as myself ; and the doing the least good to others, though out of season,

I am sure would be the most agreeable obligation I could lay upon yourself. Besides, Sir, I know full well, what pain I must give you by an epistle of this kind, and what tasteless things the praises of men are, especially in this party-age, to one whose conversation is so much in heaven; he minds them no more, than a traveller does what he hears upon the road, when he is in post-haste to take possession of a vast estate. The commendations of our conscience are our richest cordial; and we shall fare neither better nor worse in the other world, for what we are thought of in this, but as we are in truth found to be by that God, who "seeth in secret, and will reward openly." And therefore did I consult your pleasure only, I would say nothing of you, even upon this tempting occasion, but be as industriously silent, as you are of your own charities. But we, particularly we of the clergy, in justice to such uncommon virtue, in gratitude to so tender a friend, and universal a benefactor, and in consideration of the public good, ought not in conscience to pass by an example of this kind, but with thankfulness to God propose it to the imitation of the world, who choose rather to live by example than rule; for if such shining lights ought not over-much to hide themselves, surely those they shine upon, are not to do it for them; I must then, in compliance with conscience, say something, though at the hazard of your displeasure, and my own weakness.

The men who have won mighty battles, or nicely-managed surprising turns of State, the glittering descriptions of armies, and the glories that surround the head of the conqueror; the court that is made, and the incense that is offered to the rich and the fortunate, with the flattering glosses upon avarice and ambition, and the luscious panegyric on such, as have not even the form of godliness; these, I say, are the characters now-a-days, that make the shining figures in the story; these are the examples dressed up, and cultivated for the entertainment and imitation of the age; and what do these serve, but to inspire our youth with false ideas of gallantry and greatness, to enrage that fuel within them, and set those lusts and passions all on fire, which it is both their duty and their happiness to subdue and regulate: what do these serve, I say, but to bring an ill report upon our most holy religion; to make patience, meekness, temperance, and self-denial very ridicu-

lous things, and, in a word, to put every Christian virtue out of countenance.

And therefore, as ever we hope to redress this growing evil, we must set up heroes of quite another make; heroes who can forgive and bless their enemies, and have overcome the world and themselves: heroes, whose heads are big only with projects of mercy, and whose hands are perpetually stretched out in prayer and alms-deeds, and who are never at ease, but in going about doing good to mankind: in whom religion sits, as it were, in triumph, with all the passions in subjection about her, and with all the lustre that prudence and learning, good sense and good breeding can bestow, to make her amiable; in a word, heroes, who can never be taxed with making religion their craft, and godliness their gain, which is one of the weak and malicious objections at present against believing the priests;

“ ——— For they defend
Altars on which their lives depend.”

Though I believe these objectors would not have greatly cared to have defended the altar upon the same terms the priests did in the primitive times of persecution. These, these, I say, are the examples that must make men blush at their mistaken notions of honour, and fall in love with Christian virtue; and whenever we have them in so great perfection, we must not spare to show them to the world, if we design to bring primitive religion into repute and fashion.

There is a happiness of constitution, which I make bold in Tertullian's phrase to call naturally Christian; and which, as I remember, you used to call, “the grace of our mother's bowels;” and excepting, those who were “sanctified from the womb,” few of the sons of men seem more sweetly composed and turned by Nature for Christianity, and to enjoy a greater measure of complexional virtue than yourself. The good seed of moral Christianity, and the fear of God, was early cast into the good ground, and has brought forth an hundred-fold. You set out for the kingdom of heaven in the morning of life, and long before the meridian of it, was so far advanced in the way of truth, so firmly fixed upon the two Vincentian pillars, Scripture and primitive antiquity, that I find you disputing with the doctors, at an age, when our gentry find something else to do with their thoughts, than to lay them

out upon religion. And for a proof of this let anyone but read your excellent letter to an English priest of the Roman communion at Rome, and he will see a combat in some respect not much unlike that between Goliath and David; an experienced priest vanquished and argued down by one who is but a "youth, and ruddy, and of a fair countenance." And though neither the hardness of your arguments, nor the softness of your tongue, could break his bones, and bring him over in triumph to the Church of England, yet have they prevailed effectually on others; and a very late convert of yours from Popery, is an instance that arguments are like wedges, which go not well, but when they are driven by a gentle hand. And such is the felicity of your temper, that you draw no blood in controversy, and where you cannot convince, you never gall.

Having thus early secured your principles upon the catholic foundation, your next care was to live, as well as believe, as the primitive catholics did; to set your affection on things above, and not on things on earth; to make God your hope, your joy, your life, your all; to love Him with your whole heart, and your neighbour as yourself; and by continual application to the Throne of Grace, and converse with the ancient martyrs and confessors, you have worked yourself up into that holy and habitual flame, as few burn with in so clear and constant a passion, either for God or man. The devotions you have blessed the world with, best speak the abundance of your heart; for who can pray with that heavenly warmth and perfection, but one who is always at prayer? Nor can you conceal your alms, notwithstanding all your pains, not to "let thy left hand know what thy right hand doth."

Our misery is mostly of our own making; a captive in Turkey is not in truth so pitiable an object as the slave to his own appetites; and he who, suppose, has five extravagant lusts to pay portions to continually, though five times richer than another, yet comparatively is more than five times poorer, and has fifty times more trouble than that other, who will have no lust to provide for. Nay; one imperious passion, like a single thorn in the flesh, is enough to make a man uneasy, in spite of all the enjoyments upon earth. Here then you began the war betimes, and turned all your philosophy and religion against these bosom enemies, before they had gotten any strongholds

in nature ; and what a perfect conquest you have gained over self, is wondrous visible from that perpetual cheerfulness and serenity which shines about you under every condition of life. You have no fortunes now to make, nor any you fear to lose ; no ambition or malice to gratify, nor any designs, but against the kingdom of darkness. Thus it is you steer your course with safety and pleasure in dangerous seas ; thus it is, that in Job's phrase, you are hid from the scourge of the tongue, when its arrows fly thick from every quarter. For the wisdom of the serpent, and the innocence of the dove, so happily united, that where you cannot please, you never offend. And who is he that will harm you, while you are so prudent a follower of that which is good ? Who is he, that can find in his heart to harm you, while you are in pursuit only how to clothe the naked, to feed the hungry, to instruct the ignorant, and to be a father to the miserable of all parties ?

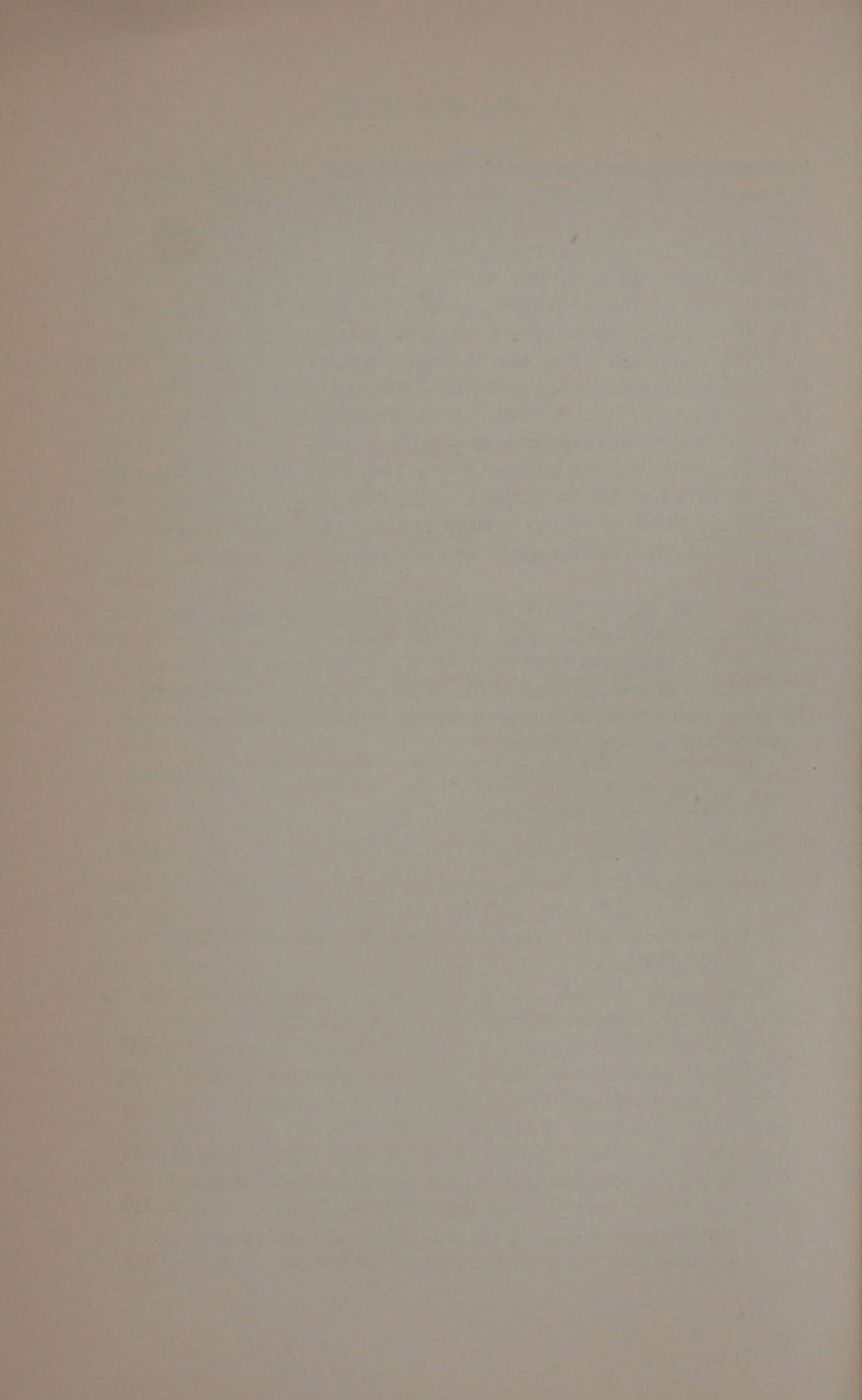
The trouble of self-denial, which some esteem so harsh and hard a part of the Christian law of religion, has been over with you for many years, and by long custom is become now your second nature, the most easy and delightful service in the world. For the pleasure that the proud and revengeful take in sacrificing to their resentments, you take in commanding those passions to be quiet. The dogs and horses, the houses and gardens, and pools of water, with men-singers, and women-singers, and other gratifications of flesh and blood, which the animal man so much dotes on, are strange insipid things to you, and rather your pity, than your pleasure. The game you hunt after is to do good to the bodies and souls of men, to plant nurseries of religion, and to water them with your own instructions, to raise up a righteous seed for future generations, and to increase the kingdom of heaven ; and none can think the pleasure of such a life, but those who live it : for there is light and gladness sown for the righteous, which they reap at present from every virtuous action, and which increases with time, and improves upon enjoyment, and leaves no ungrateful relish behind it. But O ! the prospect of that day, when the sick and needy, the hungry and naked, and the many you have turned to righteousness, shall stand all about you at the judgment-seat, and be telling of your works of mercy, and pleading for your exceeding great reward in heaven to that King, who shall then say, "Come ye blessed of My Father, in-

herit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world : for I was an hungered, and ye gave Me meat ; I was thirsty, and ye gave Me drink ; I was a stranger, and ye took Me in : for inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me." Who, I say, upon second thoughts, would not choose to enjoy your present complacency, and ravishing prospect, rather than to glitter a while, and become the gaze and talk of the people ; rather than to be sowing wind, and reaping vanity, and instead of doing justice and charity, to be treasuring up the cries of the oppressed against the day of wrath? But I must no longer follow my inclination, and therefore throw away my pen, as the painter in Plutarch did his pencil, in despair of finishing what I have but rudely begun. The bare relation of your life, would be the greatest panegyric.

May your light thus shine long before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in Heaven. May you come to the grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in, in his season ; and give me leave to do myself the honour of subscribing, honoured sir, your most humble and obliged servant,

WIL. REEVES.

CRANEFORD, *the 22nd of June 1709.*



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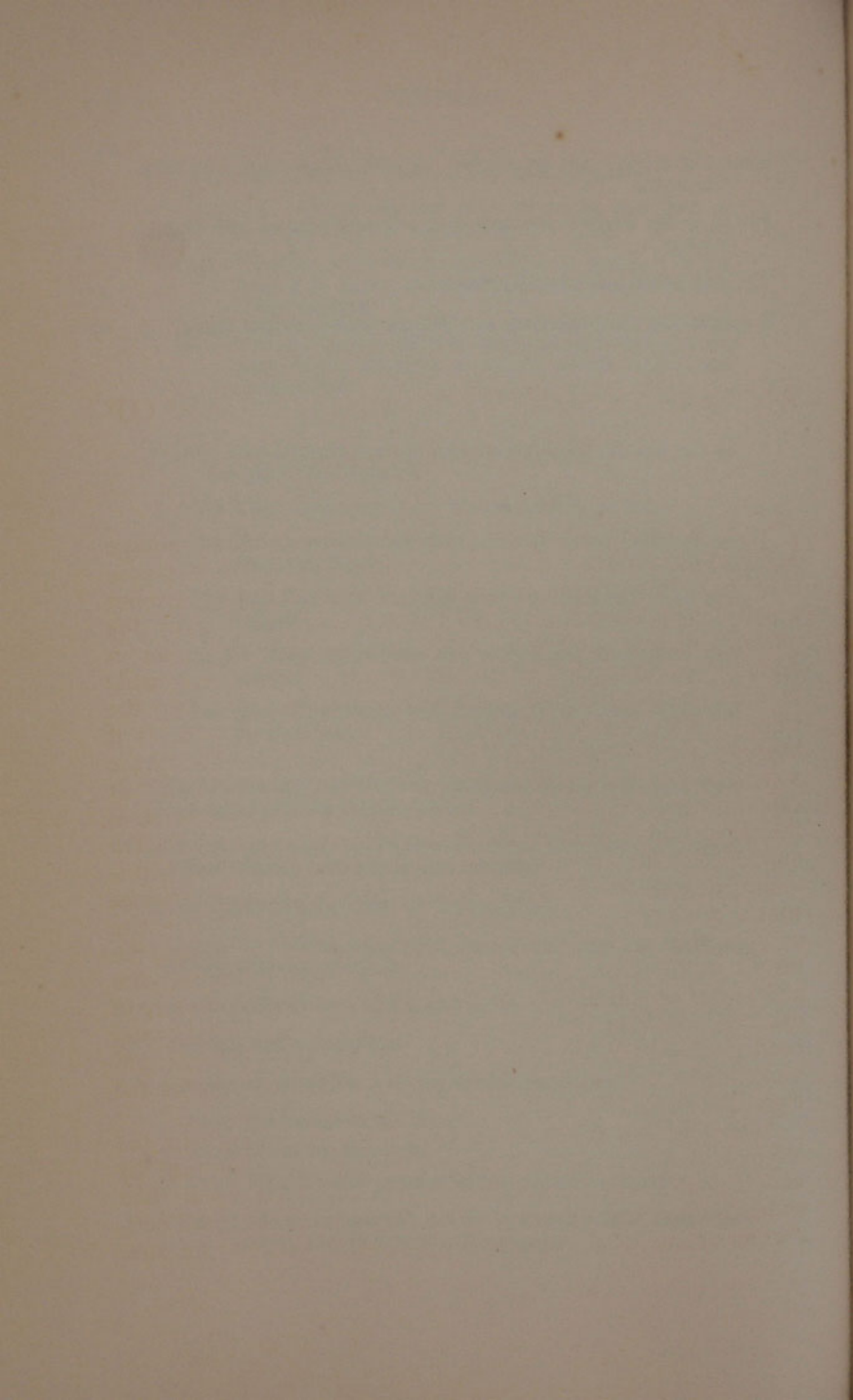
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AN ESSAY ON THE RIGHT USE OF THE FATHERS.

ONE of the ablest critics, and the most celebrated scourge of the Fathers, after all his curiosity and list to expose their nakedness, cannot but acknowledge, that those times which came nearest to the apostles, were necessarily the purest, and less subject to suspicion of corruptions either in doctrine, manners, or Christian discipline; it being reasonable to believe, that if there be any corruptions crept into the Church, they crept in by degrees, by little and little, as it happens in all other things. Which concession of his, by the way, I take to be a sufficient answer to his whole book. It cannot therefore but be worth our while to translate some of the next best books to the Bible, to open a passage for the unlearned, into the knowledge of the purest times of Christianity, next to the apostles; but not by scraps and quotations, which are neither safe nor satisfactory, but from the entire authors themselves; and by short notes to lay before the people in the most instructing view we can, that primitive form and power of godliness, that strength of reason and beauty of example, whereby the old suffering heroes apologized and lived the Gentiles into Christians, in an age when wit and wickedness, with all the kingdom of darkness, were at the highest elevation, and in confederacy against them.

And were but the translations of the same spirit with the originals, I am persuaded they could not easily be read by well-disposed people, without some good effect upon their understanding and passions. For I find in as clear and deep a writer as any of the age, among several expedients for anti-

doting the minds of the people against the poison of the times, this for one, viz. : "A choice collection in English of the ancient Christians, whereby the people might see the doctrine, manners, rites, customs, polity, and discipline, when the Church subsisted purely upon its own powers and principles independently on the empire." This is the plan I have followed, but who besides this great master himself of style and antiquity, can come up to his own rules, and happily reach that sublime and beauty of translation, he there prescribes? It is no easy matter to enter into the soul of an author, and express him to the life; to hit off a good like, with all the distinguishing graces; to animate a picture, and make the version glow with the warmth and spirit of the original. How well I have succeeded in the attempt must be left to the taste and judgment of the reader.

The Holy Scriptures (God be praised) are at liberty, and in English; but the next valuable writings are still under lock and key, and sealed up as it were in Greek and Latin from the understandings of the people; and in a Church reformed upon the ancient foot, and as yet shining with the primitive purity, in doctrine, ceremony, and government; it is unbecoming, methinks, to let those venerable records we reformed by, and glory in, lie buried in their own language, and of no more use to the generality of the people than a sun-dial in a grave; especially, since the papists make such a noise in vulgar heads, with the cry of the Fathers, the Fathers, as if all the saints and martyrs in Christendom had been Romanists. But this is right romance in a literal sense, and just such another rant only as that of Thrasillus, who in one of his mad fits took the fleet in the Attic haven to be all his own, when he had not one ship there. For when our Bishop Jewell challenged Harding, to try the difference between the Church of Rome and us, not only by dint of reason, and testimony of Scripture, but by the authority of the Fathers, wherein his antagonist concluded the sum of the Roman strength to lie, the bishop brought forth the whole host of ancients on the reformation side; whereas Master Harding could muster up no better friends for Rome, than Martialis, Abdias, Amphilochius, the decretals of the Popes, and such like notable forgeries.

Whoever sets out in the study of the Christian mystery without the conduct of the Fathers, seems to me to be sailing

into the ocean without his compass, in danger of being tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine, of splitting upon new plausibilities, of beginning and ending with Socinus, Episcopus, and such like presumptuous and self-sufficient reasoners. But the Catholic writers of the first three or four centuries, as they were faithful guardians of the gospel deposited in their churches, so were they much better appointed for the interpretation of it, than any other distant successors; for in the first fervencies of religion, the professors minded nothing else but to provide for their poor, to guard against heresy and innovation, and to live and die by the faith. Whereas the moderate and cooler Christians in after ages, began to strike up a closer alliance with the world present, to mix party and preferment in debates for truth; to fish for gold and silver, and worldly grandeur from the Gospel; and in a word, to have some other designs than purely upon heaven. Besides, the nearness to the apostles, their actual acquaintance with such men as heard the apostles expound their own doctrines, their familiarity with the customs, traditions, and phraseology of the times, and above all, the extraordinary assistances of the Holy Spirit in those early days of persecution, are advantages no modern interpreter must pretend to.

Now the Catholic doctors of the first ages, I find to be all unanimous in the doctrine of the Trinity, the divinity of Christ, the necessity of church communion, the form of church government, &c. In the next place, I consider the nature of the evidence this unanimity is founded on, and I find it to be the surest and most satisfactory kind of evidence that can be, namely the evidence of senses; for whether such and such were the doctrines and government of the church in the time of these writers, is not a question of right, but of fact. Not whether these doctrines and government are true and apostolical, for of that hereafter; but whether the Catholic Church actually taught and governed on this wise at such a time or no; and therefore, though I might justly, perhaps dissent from a martyr in matters of pure reasoning, yet I must be strangely foolhardy to call in question the testimony of his senses. For instance, I find Justin Martyr and Tertullian, with all the rest of the holy Fathers about their time, positively asserting the Son of God, the Man Christ Jesus, to be truly and properly God, and explaining His eternal

generation without any diminution of the Father, by a ray from the sun, or the kindling of one light from another. Now, perhaps, though I may not think their reasoning or similies hold exactly true in every point, yet I am sure as to the fact, viz. that the divinity of Christ was the article they maintained, though they should differ in their explications of it. For Dr South and Dr Sherlock have reasoned very differently about the principle of individuation, with respect to the persons in the ever blessed Trinity, yet this difference in the modes of explication affects not the mystery itself, which is in truth inexplicable, but it proves the Trinity to be the current doctrine at the time of the dispute; and that things may be, though we differ very much about the manner of their existence.

I find likewise some difference between two very great saints cotemporary with the apostles, between Polycarp and Anicetus, about the observation of Easter. The first pleading the practice of St John for one time, the second the practice of St Peter for another time; from which unhappy dissension I conclude, that Easter was certainly observed, and that Polycarp and Anicetus were not angels, but men; and men too of like passions with ourselves, and withal, that they might both be in the right as to fact; it being the known practice of the apostles to become all things to all men in matters of indifferency, to comply with the customs of every place they came in, as far as innocently they could; and therefore Polycarp might very well know St John out of this prudential compliance keep Easter upon one day at one place, and Anicetus might know St Peter keep it upon another day in another place for the same reason. The error then here committed was a mistake in judgment and not in fact, a disproportioned excessive zeal in a matter not worth the contention. But is this fair arguing, the Fathers were out in their judgment, therefore they were out of their senses; they reasoned wrong, therefore they could neither hear nor see right; but if infallibility of judgment is necessary to make a competent witness of fact, there is not a competent witness in the world. Besides, if such kind of differences may be urged against the testimony of the ancients, I know not what will become of the very apostles themselves; for we find very great differences between Peter,

Paul, and Barnabas. But those enemies of our church government, who make so much of this objection against the Fathers, would do well to consider, whether they can think it credible that such holy men so violently tenacious of any the least thing they knew to be apostolic, so over-zealous in such a petty difference of time about the observation of Easter; whether they can really think it possible, that men so extremely scrupulous and stirring against any appearance of innovation, should be universally still and silent in so momentous a change of church government, as that from a parity of presbyters to a superiority of bishops, had they in the least suspected any such change or alteration from the fundamental institution of the apostles, as the objectors now complain of.

But because the right use of the Fathers is a point of late much controverted, and wherewith I think myself particularly concerned upon the account of these translations, I shall enter into the merits of this controversy more distinctly; and in order hereunto the first thing I attempt, shall be to prove,

1st. That the most rational and safest method to understand the Holy Scripture, is to consult the general sense of the Catholic writers in the purest ages of the Church.

2dly. To answer the most material objections against them.

And 3rdly. To show the unhappy consequences of too lightly departing from them.

The first thing to be proved, is, that the most rational and safest method to understand the Holy Scriptures, is to consult the general sense of the Catholic writers in the purest ages of the Church.

The Holy Scripture then I take here for granted, to be a rule, and the only perfect rule of faith and manners; and the perfection of it consists herein, that it contains fully and plainly all things necessary to salvation: not that it is so perfectly full in every mode of time, and circumstance of worship, as to leave no room for any particular laws herein to succeeding governors; nor so perfectly perspicuous, as to require nothing of ingenuity and application on the learner's side. For it is evident in fact, that the Scriptures are not so absolutely perfect, from the forementioned difference between two apostolic bishops about the observation of Easter: it is

evident likewise from the original languages of the Bible, which require much pains to understand, as well as honestly to apply them; and St Peter himself tells us, that in St Paul's epistles, some things are hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other Scriptures, unto their own destruction. And as to matters of polity and discipline, which could not be easily misunderstood in the first ages of the Church, they are now confessedly much less plain from Scripture, as is too evident from the unhappy divisions about them to this day.

Nor is it reasonable to expect that the Gospel should be full and plain in every particular, not only because such particulars would swell it to an incredible bulk, but because it is not fitting in this state of darkness and trial, that men should have the intuition of angels, and see through the whole mystery of godliness at first sight. It was designed only for a touchstone as it were of honest and curable dispositions, and not to break in upon the understandings of wicked men, in spite of their wills; accordingly, we find Novatianus interpreting the Word of God one way; Photinus another; Sabellius another; Donatus another; Arrius, Eunomius, Macedonius another; Apollinaris, Priscillianus another; Jovinianus, Pelagius, Celestius another; and in fine, Nestorius another. Not to mention Ludovicus Capellus, and some other critics of the new way, who by their infinite emendations (if I may so call them) have mended away the very body of the sacred text, and by their new-fangled interpretations have expounded away the sense and soul of it too into the bargain.

Now in this maze and labyrinth of interpreters the question is, which is the most advisable way to take for the true interpretation of Scripture; for upon this hinge it is, that all our controversies turn. Some moderns have been of opinion that the Scripture itself is the law and the judge, because the Word of God is said to be¹ quick or lively; but these expositors must first prove the Bible to be literally alive, and able to speak for itself, before they can prove it to be a rule and interpreter both. Others are for setting up a human infallible judge of controversy, and if they could but tell us where we might infallibly find him, we should be very thankful for the discovery; but to tell us there is such a judge, because they think it

¹ Heb. iv. 12.

better there should be such a one, is in effect to tell us, that we are all born with our clothes about us, and houses ready made by our Maker, because they think it better that we should be so provided, than be at the trouble of providing for ourselves. But our cubit of reason, is not to be the measure of immense wisdom ; nor is it just to conclude that what we think most convenient to be done, God must think so too. For by this way of arguing it is easy to prove man, woman, and child to be infallible, for it seems most convenient that we should be all infallible, rather than be at the pains of travelling God knows where, after one that is so, therefore we are all infallible. Others are for setting the sun by their own dials, for making pure reason, exclusive of the primitive Fathers, the best interpreter or judge of Scripture ; but I am apt to believe, what I shall make more fully out anon, that the sense of a law is best understood by those who lived nearest the time of making it ; besides, our present controversies are mostly concerning facts, whether such and such doctrines were taught, and such a form of government instituted by the apostles ; and what can pure reason do here, without the testimony of the Fathers, concerning matters of fact at such a distance ? And for Scripture, the sense of that is the point in debate, and so not proper to decide the question. Was the Christian religion indeed to be mended after it came out of the hands of Christ and His apostles, and the work expressly left to the reasoners of latter days, something might be said for our modern refiners ; but all the mending that I know of late, has been only making holes in the Creed and constitution of our Church ; and that some freethinkers by the help of clear ideas have made a shift to reason themselves clearly out of all Gospel mystery, and the very canon of Scripture itself.

And lastly, to mention no more, there are some others who lay claim to the Spirit for the interpretation of the letter, and if the pretenders could make good their claim, we should be ruled by the prophets ; but experience has taught us, what a wild interpreter this pretence to the Spirit has been ; that by setting weak heads and strong passions to work upon the Bible, men have been spirited out of their senses, and ran about stark Bible-mad. For having their brains once turned by the teachers to a fantastic scheme of liberty, and their minds all wound up and continually plied with the notion of the new

Jerusalem, where the Lord's people were to reign most purely under the Lord's discipline, to put down all rule and all authority and power, the last enemy that was to be destroyed was the episcopate worse than death, and when all things should be thus subdued unto them, then should they be all in all; and have such a precious Church the like was never seen from the apostles to that day: while this vision, I say, was running in their heads, and their fancies all up after Mount Sion, whatever they read in Scripture seemed to chime in with their imaginary model; all the gracious words and mighty promises they met with, they applied to their party, they were the godly and meek ones that were to inherit the earth; they were the simple whom God had chosen to confound the wise, they were the true Israelites, and the Joshuas, Deborahs, Baraks, Gideons, Jephthas, Samsons, &c., were all types only of their leaders, who now were to root out the idolatrous nations round about, and to establish the Kingdom of Christ with perfect liberty. Such are the vagaries of this foolish fire, which some call the spirit; such the dangerous adventures of forsaking the old to follow new lights; such likewise is the absurdity of making Scripture a rule and interpreter both, and also of appealing to an infallible Judge, which neither Scripture nor antiquity say one word of, nor the makers themselves know where to find; and lastly, such is the pride and folly of setting up naked reason for the soundest interpreter, exclusive of those ancient helps which Providence has left for our learning and instruction in the Christian faith; I come now therefore to what I affirmed for the safest method to understand the Holy Scriptures, namely, the general sense of the Catholic writers in the purest ages of the Church; this is the rule our most learned and judicious reformers went by, what their constitutions prescribe, and what reason justifies, as I shall now shew particularly.

For first, notwithstanding the ingrate and dishonest practices of some late unchristian critics, the Fathers must be allowed not to have been behindhand in the common advantages of men; for their writings speak them to be as great by nature and education, of as much point and solidity, penetration and brightness, and every humane way as well adjusted for defenders of the faith, as any reasoners of the hugest size in these declining ages of the world. But secondly, they not only

set out with as great a genius, with as good a stock of nature and art, but they had the start of us by far in many considerable respects; for we nowadays find it a great impediment in our course of divinity, to learn but the language, idioms, rites, customs, and discipline of the apostolic age, in order to understand the obscurer passages of the gospel, all which advantages they were in a manner born to; so that what is our day-labour was their inheritance. Thirdly, they took all the pains imaginable to cultivate these natural advantages; for laying aside worldly wisdom, and worldly adherences, and every weight, they pressed toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Christianity was the centre of their studies; and the powers of their mind, like rays of the sun, were all united in this point, and by this union they became more shining and burning lights, than those in the succeeding ages of prosperity and sunshine, who began to think it good for them to be here, to set up their staff on this side heaven, to lower their thoughts, and scatter their affections about the ends of the earth; but in bad weather, in times of persecution, they wrapt religion closer about them, they minded nothing else but the business of their souls, and the men of one business are most likely to understand it best. Fourthly, passion, party and prejudice, are things deadly apt to distort the eye of the mind, and contract a squinting judgment; and if a freedom from these is a necessary preparation for truth, the Fathers I hope may come in for as good a share of this qualification, as any of their successors. And fifthly, before the Christian faith was made a part of the civil constitution, the professors of it were extraordinary sufferers, and consequently stood in need of extraordinary comforts and assistances proportionate to their wants, which they enjoyed accordingly; for casting out of devils, curing diseases, raising the dead, and other miraculous effusions, we find not oftener in the apostles, than in the writers of the second century, and not seldom in the writers of the third; and therefore a greater deference is certainly due to those times of inspiration; than to these ages of naked reason.

But farther yet; upon any emergent dispute about the reading or sense of the sacred text, the primitive custom was to have recourse to the books of those countries from whence

they received their faith and Bibles together ; and there to collate their copies with the *authenticæ literæ*, as Tertullian speaks, that is, with the originals themselves deposited by the apostles in the churches they founded, and withal to inquire into the constant tenor of doctrine, and the traditionary instructions left there by the founders. For though the apostolic writings contain all things necessary to salvation, yet cannot they be supposed to contain the tithe of what the apostles said and did ; and considering the practice of sects in general, and the zeal of the first Christian converts, in particular, it is not to be imagined but those faithful disciples and followers of the apostles drew up several summaries of their life and doctrine, a journal of such things as they were eye and ear witnesses to, or had received upon the credible testimony of such as had been so ; which summaries, though not of equal authority with the inspired writings, yet as authentic as any human records, and of singular use and advantage to the faithful of those times against rising heresies, and especially in matters of discipline and ceremony, which are the most disputable points in Scripture. These several abstracts in process of time were collected into one body, which together with the doctrines of apostolic men, in all probability make up the most instructive part of those which bear the title of Apostolical Constitutions, though the numerous trumperies, heresies, and inconsistencies since interlarded, make this collection as we now have it, stand justly branded for supposititious. Now that which I would infer from hence is this ; that these summaries or journals in their original purity, or the writings of those who had actually attended upon the apostles, or their immediate successors, who had heard them explain themselves particularly upon several emergencies, and treasured up those pastoral instructions, which the apostles may well be supposed to deliver by word of mouth, to such as they themselves immediately appointed over the flock of Christ ; these, I say, were such considerable helps to Christian knowledge, as no modern interpreter can lay claim to ; and which ought in reason to give the primitive writers the very next place, I think to the apostles : and so thought the great Cassander, a person of singular piety, learning, and moderation, who was for making the Church in Constantine's time the standard of the Reformation.

But because a general rule is apt to sit most easy and convincing, when illustrated with particular examples, I shall put the matter in this light, and so leave it upon the mind of the reader; the general rule then is this, viz. that the sense and meaning of any law or institution is best understood by the general practice immediately following thereupon. For instance therefore, I find it said (1 Cor. xi. 26), "As oft as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till He come." But now it is not said here, nor in any other place of the New Testament, how oft we are obliged to eat this bread and drink this cup; however finding, that the first Christians looked upon this commemorative sacrifice, as that which made way for their prayers to God, and gave the perfume and efficacy to their public devotions, and therefore that they never solemnly met to worship God without it; this general practice, I say, immediately following upon the first institution of the Sacrament, is to me an excellent paraphrase upon this text, and makes it highly reasonable to think, that we are all obliged to embrace every opportunity of communicating, and to eat this bread and drink this cup as oft as we can, in conformity to the primitive custom.

Again, it is urged that there is no particular express precept in the Gospel for infant baptism; to which I might answer, that circumcision made without hands (which St Paul calls baptism), succeeding in the room of that made with hands, infants must be concluded as well qualified to be admitted into covenant with God now by the spiritual, as before by the carnal circumcision; and circumcision being changed into baptism without any change of time, that must continue upon the old foot without some express command to the contrary; and therefore there was no occasion for any particular express precept in the Gospel for baptizing infants. But upon farther inquiry I find it a constant usage in the purest ages of the Church to baptize infants, and to sign them with the sign of the cross, and therefore from such a foundation in Scripture joined with the general practice of the Church immediately ensuing upon the institution, I conclude infant baptism a point indisputable, and the ceremony of the cross to be apostolical. For had there been any innovation in this case, I can hardly think but such scrupulous persons would have made as great a stir here,

as they did about the observation of Easter. However, thus much is certain, that the primitive Fathers had much better opportunities of knowing the apostles' mind for the practice of infant baptism and the sign of the Cross, than any of the moderns can pretend to for laying aside of either.

Thus again it is said (Acts xx. 7), "That upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached to them." Now these words seem fairly to intimate that the first day of the week, or the Lord's Day, was set apart or sanctified for religious worship; but then finding Justin Martyr, who wrote but forty years after the death of St John, telling us in the following Apology, "That on Sunday all the Christians in city or country meet together, because that is the day of our Lord's resurrection, and then we have read unto us the writings of the prophets and apostles; this done, the president or bishop makes a sermon to the assembly, to exhort them to imitate and do the things they heard; then we all join in prayer, and after that we receive the sacrament, and they that are willing and able to, give alms." Now finding this, I say, related by Justin and the Fathers in general, it clears up the foregoing text beyond dispute for the religious observation of the Lord's Day in the time of the apostles.

Thus likewise it is said in Scripture, "That the powers that be are ordained of God, that we must needs be subject not only for wrath but for conscience' sake: for this is thank-worthy, if a man for conscience towards God endure grief suffering wrongfully, for even hereunto were ye called; because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow His steps." Now the extent and meaning of these texts is the question in debate; for the resolution of which, I consider first the words themselves, and find it evident, that the necessary subjection here spoken of, is not due to the higher powers upon the score of personal virtue, but because they are ordained of God; and therefore that resistance by force of arms purely upon the account of suffering wrongfully, is against the Christian law: for even hereunto were we called, and are pressed to it from the example of Christ suffering wrongfully for us; and because the suffering which we are not obliged by God to undergo, we cannot be said to undergo for conscience towards God. But for fear I should be out in my reasoning, I make inquiry into the general practice of

Christendom upon the first issuing forth of this new unwelcome doctrine to flesh and blood; and I find as universal agreement in the point of non-resistance, as in any one article of faith; that the primitive Christians were always ready to suffer, where they could not obey; that they looked upon Nero, and the most inhuman Emperors, as God's ministers, and therefore subject to God alone, and that it was not for want of power, but merely out of conscience that they did not resist. I am sure likewise that self-preservation was as much in force, and natural rights and liberties as much natural rights and liberties then as now. But then how far the nature of absolute and mixed governments, abdication, and other circumstances, may alter the measures of obedience, is not my province to determine: all I think reasonable to infer is, that such conscientious sufferers, who seem to have so much Scripture and antiquity on their side, and who know how to want with the primitive quietness, are in a very pitiable condition, and ought to have great allowances made for their scruples. And for this, I think, I have the authority of a very considerable casuist; for my Lord of Sarum has as much charity with something less reason, I think, either from Scripture or antiquity, even for the quakers; for had swearing in general been unlawful, God would not have given us the example of swearing by Himself, nor would Christ have answered upon oath; besides St Paul frequently calls God to witness, and the primitive Christians refused not to swear by the safety, but the genius of the Emperor, because they looked upon the genii as demons. However, because it is said, "Swear not at all, but let your yea be yea, and your nay, nay, lest you fall into condemnation" (which, according to the bishop, can only respect swearing, in common conversation), this learned and charitable person concludes thus, "It must be confessed that these words seem to be so express and positive, that great regard is to be had to a scruple that is founded on an authority that seems to be so full."

Lastly, another controversy which has cruelly cankered the minds of men, and almost eaten out the heart of religion, and eats on still as unmercifully as ever, is the case of church government. Nor are men to blame for showing a just regard for what they believe in conscience to be of divine institution. And yet of all controversies, this of ecclesiastical polity, may

in my opinion, by the help of the Fathers, be as easily decided as any. For a form of government being an object of sense, though men may differ in their judgment about the meaning of laws, yet cannot they differ so much in their eyesight as to mistake a monarchy for a commonwealth. Church government then being an object of sense, wherein the meaning of Scripture is the point in debate, what fairer way of trying this cause than by the general sense and practice of the Christian Church in and immediately after the time of the apostles? Nor can the contending parties refuse joining issue upon these terms. For those who admit the canon of Scripture upon the testimony of the Fathers, will find themselves hard put to it for a reason why they reject the very same testimony in the case of church government. For certainly whether bishops were superior to presbyters was a matter of fact full as notorious, as whether such and such were the writings of the apostles. Nay, I may say more notorious, for the superiority of bishops was visible to all, no one Christian could be ignorant of it, and therefore there could be no need of a General Council to define the form of church government, as there was to settle the canon of Scripture.

Now the only argument as yet urged with any show of reason from Scripture and antiquity, for the purity of bishop and presbyter, is this, that both these in Scripture are terms synonymous, or different names only for one and the same order of men. For satisfaction herein I consult the most ancient Fathers, and for the first three hundred years find not one Christian writer, who enumerating the orders of the Church, or the bishops of his own time ever uses the words, bishop and presbyter promiscuously, or ever thought them so used in Scripture. For instance, Ignatius, St John's disciple, Bishop of Antioch, and Martyr, mentions the distinct orders of bishop, presbyter, and deacon, no less than sixteen times in seven short epistles; but for the ease of the reader, I shall set down one noble passage only, "Be all obedient to your bishop, as Jesus Christ was to the Father; and to the presbytery, as to the apostles. The deacons also reverence, as the ordinance of God. Let no one meddle in church affairs without order from his bishop. Let that Eucharist be looked upon as valid, which is administered by the bishop, or his licentiate. Where the bishop shall be present, there let the people be present

also ; as where Christ Jesus is, there is the Church catholic. Without the bishop, it is not lawful either to baptize, or celebrate the love feast ; but what he shall approve of, that is well-pleasing to God, that so you may proceed upon safe and sure grounds in all your actions."

Justin Martyr, to the best of my remembrance, never uses the words we translate bishop and presbyter, but towards the conclusion of the following Apology ; where his design is only to describe the nature of the Eucharist, with the several duties of those who officiated therein ; and because this sacrament was administered sometimes by the bishop, and sometimes by a deputed presbyter, he makes use of the general term *προεσώς* or president ; but the deacons he names particularly, their part herein being wholly and solely appropriated to their own order. *Vide* Bishop Pearson's "Vindication of the Epistles of Ignatius," cap. 13, p. 183.

But Irenæus, Polycarp's disciple, and contemporary with Justin, urges a succession of bishops from the apostles to his time ; and moreover adds, that the apostles themselves committed the care of the churches into their hands, leaving them to succeed not only in the place, but to the jurisdiction of the apostles.

Tertullian challenges the heretics to trace up the pedigree of their bishop to some apostle, and to make out their claim that way ; putting the proof of apostolical churches upon a lineal succession of bishops from the apostles. Now this had been a notable silly challenge indeed, a proof scandalously weak and inconclusive, had it not been notoriously evident, that wherever the apostles founded churches they always appointed bishops to preside over them. And then, he not only mentions such an apostolic race of bishops in general, but particularly instances in Polycarp placed over Smyrna by St John, and in Clemens set over Rome by St Peter. And moreover adds, that all other churches are just so episcopally constituted, and exhibit a catalogue of bishops, descendants of the apostolic seed. But for fear of being burthensome with quotations, and for completer satisfaction in this point, I refer to our most learned Bishop Pearson, who has gone through the Fathers of the second century, and examined them distinctly upon this head, and the objections against them, and withal has given a particular answer to the most celebrated

passages in the gospel urged for the presbyterian cause from this supposed community of names.

The heretic Aerius was the broacher of this opinion, ἢ τὸ αὐτὸν Ἐπίσκοπον, τὸ αὐτὸν Πρεσβύτερον, "That bishop and presbyter were the very same;" an opinion no sooner published but exploded by Epiphanius, and unheard of till the fourth century. True, indeed, this community of names was taken up again, and strenuously argued for (though not for the same purpose with Aerius) by some eminent writers both of the Greek and Latin Church, just upon the brink of the fifth century. But then it ought to be considered, that the authorities of this age are in a manner modern, and that they receive great abatements not only from their distance, but the disagreement among themselves. For Chrysostom and his followers, who make no doubt but that the two orders were distinct both in office and dignity, under the apostles, and as such appointed by them, yet allow the names bishop and presbyter to be reciprocally predicated of both. But Theodoret will have bishop and presbyter applied indifferently to those of the second order only, or whom we call mere presbyters, concluding those we properly style bishops to have went under the title of apostles. And lastly, Jerome agreeing with neither, will have the inferior priests promiscuously entitled bishops or presbyters; this second order of priesthood being in his opinion originally, and for some time the first, and that of the episcopate an after-addition. Now from this dissension among the latter patrons of titular-community, it is to me pretty evident that the names, bishop and presbyter, are not promiscuously used in Scripture; for were they so used, I cannot but think it unaccountably strange, that no apostolical writer, nay, no Christian writer at all that I know of, should ever use the same words with the same confusion, in imitation of the apostles. However, granting these younger interpreters to be in the right, yet will it no more follow from this confusion of names, that bishops and presbyters are one and the same in power, than that an emperor and his general are one and the same in power, because the word imperator is indifferently used for both, as hath been well observed of late.

After all, though Chrysostom, and Jerome, and the rest of that class, are now the Fathers of figures and most in vogue amongst us (so venerable are the minor Fathers, when they

may be thought to serve a turn), yet the mischief of it is, that these very boasted patrons of the presbyterian scheme are expressly against it; nor can they with all the arts of accommodation be made to conform with it. For every man of them allows that superiority of bishops we contend for, and withal assert this superiority to have been established by the apostles, for fear there should be as many schisms as congregations; and they all unanimously grant the power of ordination to be entirely lodged in the bishop. For Chrysostom speaking as low and moderate of episcopacy, as he well could, says, "That ordination is the sole point wherein bishops are superior, and in this alone they seem to be above presbyters." And even Jerome himself in the very place where he rises highest in the commendation of the presbyterate, he excepts ordination as a work appropriated to the bishop. And the origin of the episcopate in his opinion stands thus, "Before that by the instinct of the devil factions commenced in religion, and the popular cry was, I am of Paul, I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, the churches were governed by a common council of presbyters; but after every one began to lay claim to those he baptized, as if they were his own, and not Christ's, it was decreed all the world over, that one chosen out of the presbyters should be set over the rest, whose office it should be to take the whole care of the Church, and that so the seeds of schism might be destroyed." I have set down the passage at length, because it is looked upon as the presbyterian pillar, and as full of force as the Trojan horse, to the utter ruin of the episcopate. Now that the Church was governed by a common council of presbyters till the divisions at Corinth, is an opinion wherein, according to my little skill in antiquity, St Jerome stands single; and upon these divisions, that a general decree should be issued forth for a new order of bishops all the world over, and this decree taken notice of by no writer before Jerome, is somewhat strange. But supposing it true, it is from hence evident beyond contradiction, that in the time of Paul, Apollos, and Peter, about whom these schisms arose, the episcopal order was established. Besides, this same author gives us to understand, "that the apostles ordained presbyters and bishops through every province." He affirms likewise, "bishops, presbyters, and deacons, to have the same authority in the church

as Aaron and his sons, and the Levites had in the temple." He gives us also a catalogue of the bishops of Rome from St Peter; and tells us, that James the Just was the first bishop of Jerusalem; another catalogue of the bishops of Antioch from Peter; and in his list of Asia, not only says, that Polycarp was ordained bishop of Smyrna by St John, but styles him *Totius Asiæ Princeps*, prince of all Asia.

If then the churches, according to Jerome, were governed by a common council of presbyters till the contentions at Corinth, I ask whether the apostles had then authority to fix a superior order of bishops all the world over for the prevention of the like schisms for the time to come? If they had, and actually did leave all christendom under episcopal government, then I would know, whether such an universal apostolical decree is reversible by any authority but that which made it? Now to solve this by a distinction between a Divine and apostolical institution, in a case of such extent and importance, is in my opinion to solve it by a distinction without a difference. For did not the apostles act by that Divine commission from Christ, "As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you"? Did they not by virtue of this commission ordain bishops, as well as presbyters, in every province, according to Jerome? Does not he affirm bishops thus apostolically instituted, to be of the same Divine authority in the church, as Aaron was in the temple? Did not the apostles appoint the order of deacons to take care of the poor? And does not Ignatius call this apostolic appointment, in the passage above cited, the ordinance of God? And to think that the apostles should make an order of bishops of their own heads only, and set that order above presbyters, which is confessedly a *jure divino* order, is in my opinion to think very indifferently of the apostles? Why then, the order of deacons may continue, now the poor are provided for by lay overseers, and the order of bishops may not, now we are overrun with schisms, I would fain see any other reason for this, but only that deacons are below presbyters, and bishops above them. For if bishops, who in the Christian church answer to Aaron in the temple according to Jerome, may be laid aside by human authority, why not priests and Levites, or presbyters and deacons? And then we may shake hands with the author of the rights, and vote for no orders in the church at all. How then our presbyterian

dissenters can defend themselves under St Jerome's shadow, and make the order episcopal, one article for a just ground of separation, which their patron asserts to have been established by the apostles for the prevention of schism all the world over, passes my understanding ; and is a point they ought seriously to lay to heart, as they would not be accountable at the last day for all the divisions, jealousies, and tempests, which upon this very score have been raised amongst us, and that St Jerome himself does not rise up in judgment against them.

Now put these things together, church-government is the point in dispute, the superiority of bishops we think fairly made out from the very letter of the sacred text, and so thought all the most ancient Fathers ; this primitive interpretation is farther confirmed by the practice of the apostles, who enthroned many bishops with their own hands ; it was never disputed till the fourth century, and then by an heretic, and condemned as soon as disputed. The episcopate was unanimously allowed to be apostolical, and above the presbyterate in dignity and jurisdiction, by those very writers, who in Scripture assert them both to go by the same name. No one church can be produced where the episcopal government did not take place. No general council met to appoint it ; the Armenian and Persian churches in the east, those of Spain in the west, of Africa in the south, and of Great Britain in the north, submitted to bishops without exception. And the proof we have for all this, is the universal testimony of those writers, upon whose authority we admit the canon of Scripture.

Here then I would ask a conscientious dissenter, whether in his heart he can believe that the primitive saints and martyrs would invade the episcopal power of their own heads, and in defiance of the apostles, who were so over-tenacious of the apostolic practice in the minutest matters ? Whether they would attempt this without any worldly motive, but greater loads of care and affliction, for the care of all the churches lay upon them, and the storm generally fell first and hardest upon the bishops ; and men do not usually invade upon such principles ; and if they did, whether it was possible for the invaders to prevail in so short a time over christendom, and without opposition, or one word of complaint from the degraded presbyters against the usurping prelates ? For usurpations of this sacred kind, we know with a witness, never come

in without remarkable clamours and convulsions, are seldom perfectly forgotten, and the revolution skinned over without a scar. That bishops therefore should obtain wherever the gospel did, so soon, and with such universal silence, cannot be accounted for any other way than that the gospel and the episcopate came in upon the same Divine title.

Bishop, presbyter and deacon, then were the three orders of the Church from the beginning to the days of John Calvin, who was a wise and learned man, but he was a man, and notably distinguished his frailty upon these two accounts. For first, as is evident from himself, and the writer of his life, he thrust himself into the sacred function, without being lawfully called and sent to execute the same. And secondly, without consulting other churches, without any respect to the sense and practice of all Christian antiquity, he of his own head drew up a new scheme of ecclesiastical polity, wherein he excludes the episcopal order, and lodges the whole power of the Church in a minister with lay elders; and taking advantage of the fondness and necessity of the people, and the absence of the bishop, made them swear as absolutely and unconditionally to his new scheme, as if every tittle of it had been dictated from Mount Sinai; though by his own confession but intimated in Scripture, and this intimation never thought of by any of the ancients, nor any strictures of such a form entertained in any church upon earth before his own time. The French churches, with that of Scotland threw themselves into the Geneva model; but we of England with more modesty, and upon surer grounds, followed the plain sense of Scripture, authorised by the interpretations, and the universal practice of the purest churches in the purest ages; and so reformed from the corruptions of Rome, but kept close to the primitive doctrine, and primitive government; concluding, that we might as well reform ourselves out of the inferior orders of presbyter and deacon, as that of bishop. And that if any one of these apostolic institutions might be nulled by human authority, so might the rest, and so we might come to have a new form of church government every moon, or if that seem best, none at all. And therefore, though I have all imaginable good will and charity for the foreign churches, who under their hands have testified their readiness to conform with us, were they in

our place, and plead necessity for their difference, yet being no judge I shall not take upon me to determine how far this plea now will justify or excuse them. But this plea of theirs, undoubtedly, can never reach our home dissenters, who have nothing to object against the moderation of our present bishops (as Calvin had against those of Rome) but only that they are bishops. And therefore I cannot think it either reasonable or lawful, to write ourselves out of an apostolical institution, confirmed by the concurring sense and practice of all the Fathers, by a prescription of fifteen hundred years' standing, by the judgment of our own reformers and martyrs, and by our present establishment; I can never think ourselves, I say, obliged in charity to write ourselves out of this complicated authority into a compliance with such consciences, as make such bishops one article for schism, which their pretended patron St Jerome makes decreed by the apostles for the extirpation of the seeds of schism all the world over.

Thus I have endeavoured to make out the first thing proposed, viz. that the most rational and safest method to understand the Holy Scripture, is to consult the general sense of the Catholic writers in the purest ages of the Church. And this I have done by showing the natural and moral advantages of the ancients above the moderns, for the better understanding of the minds of the apostles: and though perhaps I might justly have advanced their authority higher in matters of pure reasoning, from the extraordinary effusions of the Spirit, which were very plentiful in the first ages, yet I chose chiefly to consider them as witnesses of fact only; because in this view our finest reasoners cannot question their sufficiency, without calling in question at the same time the genuineness of the gospel. And to make this matter yet more intelligible, I have taken for granted what I believe will be hardly contested; namely, that the sense or meaning of any law or institution is best understood by the general practice, immediately ensuing thereupon; and this rule I have illustrated by five instances, which are not very easily made out from the bare words of Scripture, but fully cleared up by the practice of the ancients: and I have insisted the longer upon the instance of Episcopacy, because that eminence is the mark of many an ill eye, and the ground of the greatest heart-

burnings and divisions amongst us; and because from the foundations in the gospel, and the superstructure and settlement of churches after the same form by the apostles, and their immediate successors, we may as demonstrably conclude the order of bishops to be of apostolical, that is, of Divine appointment, as we can conclude anything from history. And now upon the whole, I think I may with reason affirm the primitive Christians to be not only the most faithful guardians of the canon, but of the sense of Scripture also; and therefore when I see some men playing their whole artillery against them, and running riot upon the absolute perfection of Scripture, the better only to run down the use of the Fathers, and by getting them out of the way to fall foul upon the unguarded letter, and murder it to their own purpose, it puts me in mind of the like practices upon their sovereign, as upon the Scripture: for just such hollow panegyrics came whistling from the same quarter, that a good king would reign most gloriously without his guards, alone secure in the hearts and affections of his people, and when they had importuned him out of his forces, how they decided his person I need not tell. And thus much concerning the use and service of the Fathers.

I come now in the second place to answer the most material objections against them.

The design of criticism at first was to rescue injured authors from the depredations of time and moths, or much worse vermin, to enlighten and beautify their sense, and restore them to their original perfection. But now it is the art of finding fault only, or rather of making wounds for the reputation of a cure, and vending wit at the price of honesty. And finding fault being what we are naturally disposed to, and correction an act of authority which we all admire, critics have multiplied in great quantities from this corruption. Happy the man, who can but discover a spot in the sun, or in some celebrated writer; how noble the discovery, and the seeming blemish to be illustrated above all his other indisputable beauties? For instance, we ordinary folks have all this while taken Joseph for a mighty honest upright man; and for his religion, the peculiar care of Providence; and for his benefactions to Egypt, the darling of king and people; and afterwards idolised under the Egyptian Apis. But alas! no such

matter, we have been miserably misled by Moses, and quite out in our mythology; for the modern critics have found out this same Joseph to have been an arrant minister of state, a promoter of arbitrary principles, and a downright enslaver of the people, and that his memory was therefore odious, and consequently the story of his being worshipped, under the symbol of Serapis, a silly groundless story. Thus again, from an iota or one tittle, to question whether Jesus Christ was not a Cabalist, sounds little better in my ears than to question whether He was not a conjuror; however this is new, and out of the way, and therefore wonderful. In like manner to give broad hints that after all the care and integrity of the ancients, our Bible is not yet as it should be; to make Sarah and Hagar, which St Paul really thought to be types of the two covenants, to be the issue only of St Paul's allegorising fancy, or which is much the same, borrowed from some vulgar Midrasch, that is, some Jewish whimsies. These, I say, are marvellous discoveries, fresh and sparkling, and such as never enter into the head of an ordinary Christian. Whether the learned Mr Basnage, in his "Ecclesiastical History," as well as Le Clerc, have not run extravagant lengths in this way of criticism, I shall leave to their readers. But as the best fruit is most subject to vermin, so the Fathers have been eminently pestered with this sort of critics: every mote in their eye, by the powers of the critical magic, thickens into a beam; and the most puisne objection against the first and faithfulest servants of Christ, is magnified to a demonstration, not only against the opinions they held, but against their authority, even in matters of fact; the chiefest of which objections I shall now particularly consider.

The first objection is taken from the difficulty of knowing what the true sense of the most ancient Fathers was, and to make out this, it is urged, that most of the writings for the three first centuries are lost, in which it is possible we might have met with very different relations, from what we find in those now extant.

Now this, to say the best of it, is a very odd way of arguing, weak in itself, and worse in its consequences. For the question before us, is, concerning the true sense of the Fathers we have, and the objection is grounded upon a presumptive one in those we have not; in this case then the lost writings must be

produced to justify this presumption, or the objection is pure dream and imagination. And if such surmises may serve for proofs, or the loss of some writings invalidate the rest in being, historical certainty is quite at an end; and if a man has a mind to gratify himself with perhaps and possibles, he may gainsay any matters of fact in history; because, had we all the histories of those times, it is possible perhaps we might find it to be as he fancies; and the consequence will be, that the Scriptures themselves are questionable, because the testimony of many of the Fathers are wanting, which might have contradicted these we have. Nay, Calvin, Peter Martyr, Zanchy, Whitaker, and others, make no doubt but some canonical Scriptures are wanting, from whence Bellarmine argues against the sufficiency of the canon, which is the very argument here turned against the authority of the ancients. But the answer is short, and will serve for both, viz., that what is left is sufficient, or Providence would have left us more; and what we never had, we have nothing to answer for; but not to believe upon a competency, is to be sullen and starve because we have not all, or deny our Maker, because He has not made us angels. But this is so weak an objection that I will pursue it no farther, only I would fain see a good reason, why we should not conclude, that the Fathers (supposing them honest) which are lost, should rather confirm those in being, than contradict them; for the Catholic writers which are lost, were once extant, and read, and approved, and many fragments preserved by Eusebius and others, and these fragments discover nothing heterodox, nor the collectors of them suspect any such thing, and therefore why should we?

Reason 2. It is difficult knowing the sense of the Fathers, because that their writings of the first centuries treat of matters very far different from the controversies now on foot about religion.

To which I answer, 1st. That it is not possible that the whole race of controversies from the beginning of the gospel to the conclusion of the world, should be all distinctly stated and defined by the primitive writers; and if possible, not reasonable, for by the application of a general rule I may distinguish straight from crooked, right from wrong, without a particular instruction in all the infinite variety of curves; and a physician who has plainly prescribed all I am to do for the

recovery of my health, has no occasion to set down every particular I am not to do, or the numberless ways of destroying myself. 2ndly. Most of the modern heterodoxies are but new turned, or refinements upon the old, and therefore the answer then will in a great measure serve now. 3rdly. As to transubstantiation, saint-worship, the infallibility of the Pope, and such like points, the very silence of the ancients in these cases is a loud argument against them. And 4thly. This reason, if it makes anything against the Fathers, makes more against the Scriptures: for in the Bible we have no polemic discourses, no set treatise on purpose about the points now in dispute, but the Fathers enlarge upon the sacred text, improve hints, set obscure passages in a fuller light, give us an account of many apostolic traditions, rites, and customs, and particularly argue against, and condemn many heresies, of which the Scriptures say not one word; and therefore the want of an explicit answer to the questions which shall arise, holds stronger against the writings of the apostles, than those of their successors. And thus it is the Papists argue against the perfection of the Scriptures; there are many controversies now (say they) in religion, whereof the Scriptures make no mention, such as the number of canonical books, of sacraments, the form of trine-immersion, rebaptization, the observation of the Lord's Day, &c., the Scriptures therefore are not a perfect rule of controversies, because there is no knowing the sense of the apostles in these cases: now if the objectors will not allow of this arguing in the Papists against the Scriptures, why they will urge it against the writings of the ancients, which handle abundance more controversies than the Scriptures do, is a question I would fain see answered.

Reason 3. That those writings which go under the names of the ancient Fathers, are not all truly such, but a great part of them supposititious and forged, so that you know not what is theirs, and what is not.

The case of spurious books, and spurious children, I take to be much the same; and should I argue thus, that those children which go under the names of their reputed fathers, are not all truly such, but a great part of them bastards, so that there is no knowing which are theirs, and which not: I hope our fathers would cry out shame on the argument, or else it would make mad work in the world; and yet the argu-

ment holds equally good both ways, against the legitimacy of children, as well as the genuineness of books; that is, the argument is good for nothing, for the spuriousness of some, ought not to affect the genuineness of others; and there is no manner of consequence, that because some false pieces have been fathered upon Justin Martyr and Tertullian, therefore these Apologies, which were never questioned, ought to lie under the same imputation. So that before we take upon us to bastardize, we must give particular reasons for so doing; and he who will not believe a book, or a child, to be the lawful issue of that man, whose name it bears, when he has no reason to suspect the contrary, ought to believe nothing upon less grounds than demonstration, and never to eat or drink till he can demonstrate the goodness of the food; and however this way of reasoning may suit with his head, I daresay it will not agree very long with his stomach.

2ndly. If the spuriousness of some pieces may attain the rest, why do the objectors make use of the Fathers occasionally, when they fancy it may serve their turn? Why do they admit the canon of Scripture upon the authority of the Fathers; for to admit their testimony in one case, and to reject it in another equally clear and universal, is to play fast and loose, and act upon no principles at all.

3rdly. Supposing a book, not to be that author's, whose name it bears, or to be anonymous, yet if it were manifestly written in the first ages of the Church, and quoted and approved by the Catholic writers of that or the following centuries, I see no ground to object against it, unless we will affirm a good book, without the author's name, to be good for nothing.

4thly. There is an end of all historical evidence, of all law, friendship, and commerce in the world, if the supposititiousness of some writings, the forgery of some deeds, the falsehood of some friends, the adulterating of some coin, must affect all the rest. Nay, there is an end of all gospel, for many spurious pieces have passed under the name of the apostles. But now if there be no rules to distinguish what is apostolic from what is not, why do we receive the New Testament? If there be, I ask, why these rules will not serve in the case of the Fathers, as well as the apostles? For to say, that providence has interposed to preserve the divinely-inspired writings from all sorts of injury, is what we find to be false in fact, because there

have been spurious pieces fathered upon the apostles, as well as their successors.

A fourth reason why it is so hard coming at the sense of the Fathers, is, that those writings of the Fathers which are legitimate, have been in many places corrupted by time, ignorance, fraud, &c.

This reason differs from the former, as clipping does from coining, and the same answer might serve for both; but it is made a distinct article upon which the objectors flourish with great indulgence; and the better to amuse the reader with a fine show of learning, give in a very tragical declaration of the many corruptions which from time to time have befallen the ancients. And had they been in the humour, could have wept over the Holy Scriptures in the same tone, and told us, how sadly they too have suffered by time, by the ignorance of scribes, and by frauds, both pious and malicious, and withal, quoted a most genuine passage out of Tertullian, to let us know how cruelly the heretics mangled the sacred text, and that Marcion used a knife instead of a style, not to corrupt, but cut it to his liking; and so perhaps the various lections in Dr Mill's late edition of the New Testament, will in good time be urged by some critics against the authority of the gospel. But does not St Austin tell Faustus, that if any dispute arises about various readings, which are but few in number, and sufficiently known to the learned, we have recourse to the books of those countries, from whence we received our copies and religion together, and are willing they should determine the controversy. Or if there still appear any difference, the greater number of copies ought to be preferred before the less; those which are most ancient, to those of a later date, are the original languages to all others. Thus do they proceed, who, when they meet with any difficulties in the Holy Scriptures, search and examine things with a desire to be instructed, and not merely for dispute and cavil.

But it is not the common fate of books to suffer by frequent transcriptions? Are they not all subject to the teeth of time, moths, and critics, unless preserved like the children of Israel's clothes, by continued miracle? Why then may not St Austin's rule serve us for the Fathers, as well as the apostles? Why may not the general design and sense of an

author be understood, notwithstanding some corruptions, as easily as we distinguish an old acquaintance, though something disfigured by the smallpox? Are not these erratas and frauds, in a great measure, now detected and cured by comparing manuscripts and other helps of the critical art in learned and honest hands? Do we build any strange doctrines upon any suspicious passage, or any single Father, and not upon their unanimous consent clearly deduced from many of their works, and from many places therein, which were never questioned? Do not the ancients as they now stand corrected in the best editions agree with the Scriptures in faith, manners, and church polity? And how came they, after all these corruptions, thus to tally with the gospel in fundamentals, unless it be objected also that the gospel and the Fathers are corrupted both alike? Before then the objectors cry down an author for spurious, or corrupted in whole or in part, let them bring forth their strong reasons for their loud clamours; let them rally their forces, and try their skill over again upon Ignatius; for while that martyr's epistles are suffered to pass for genuine, there lies an insuperable bar in the way of some men; and that they are genuine, our excellent Bishop Pearson has, I think, demonstrated, to the eternal shame of the Dallæans and all their adherents.

A fifth reason is, that the style of the Fathers is so encumbered with figures and rhetorical flourishes, &c., that there is hardly any knowing what they would be at.

This is much easier said than proved; and were it necessary to set out the primitive writers in their native proper colours, I could with half the pains their adversaries have taken to disfigure them, show as noble plainness, as manly reasoning, as moving metaphors, and just flights in them, as in any of the moderns, enough I am sure to deserve better of us for their writings, (if not for their lives) according to Horace's rule of criticism, *Ubi plura nitent, non ego paucis offendar maculis*. But tropes and figures we are not concerned about, but only whether the Fathers have expressed themselves intelligibly in matters of fact. A certain author has furnished us with one and fifty reasons for the obscurity of the Scriptures; but be these reasons as they will, I think I may truly say, that the writings of the prophets and apostles abound with tropes and metaphors, types and allegories, parables and

dark speeches, and are as much, nay much more unintelligible in many places than the writings of the ancients; and yet these in a great measure are now brought to light by the diligence of learned men. But supposing they were not, how do these figurative expressions affect the plain historical part of the Bible? For instance, cannot I know, "that in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God;" that this Word or Logos took upon Him human nature in the womb of a virgin, did many miracles, was at length crucified, dead and buried, and rose again the third day, and some time after ascended into heaven; cannot I understand these relations of fact, because there are some other things hard to be understood in St Paul's epistles, and harder yet in the Revelations? All therefore that can be argued from hence against the Fathers with any show of reason, is, that such dazzling figures may sometimes render their opinions less distinct and certain, but how they can weaken their testimony in matters of fact, is what I want to know. For supposing them now and then in the clouds, and soaring out of sight in metaphor and allusion; yet when they descend in view again, and tell us plainly, that the order of bishops was of Divine apostolic institution; and give us a catalogue of succeeding bishops, from the apostles to their own time, and withal tell us, that such and such were the genuine writings of the apostles; why is not their testimony as intelligible in one case as in the other? For I take it to be full as easy to distinguish naked truth, or a simple relation of fact from oratory and flourish, as to tell whether a man be dressed or undressed. After all, if this objection be of any force, why do not the objectors except against these figurative hyperbolical Fathers for everything, even for the canon of Scripture? Why don't they suspect some dangerous trope, some snake under every flower? If they say, that they quote them only when they speak distinctly, simply, and without metaphor, let them prove that we do otherwise, or else I am sure we are in no wise concerned in this objection.

Reason 6. That the Fathers oftentimes conceal their own private opinions, and speak those things which themselves believed not, &c.

To charge the holy martyrs and confessors of old with the latitude of a Jesuit, with shuffling and lying for the truth, when

in their Apologies they enter so many protests against it, and scorn to be excused from torments and death by any arts of insincerity and equivocation; this is so foul an article, that nothing less than demonstration can justify a suspicion. But let us see how they make good the charge. Why in the first place we are given to understand from some passages out of St Jerome, for their length only considerable, that in his commentaries upon the Scriptures, there is a rhapsody of different opinions tumbled together in a heap, without so much as intimating either which is good or bad, or probable, or necessary, or to the purpose or not. Now this is false in fact, and the false accuser of his brethren could not but know it, for he has played the slippery part here himself, which he charges upon the Fathers, leaving out a passage which puts quite another face upon the matter. For St Jerome tells us, that it was the way in commentaries to lay down the opinions of others as well as their own, but withal, openly to declare which were heretical, and which catholic. But is not this too the way of commenting now-a-days; and why is it more tricking in the ancients than the moderns?

Secondly. If there is no way of distinguishing St Jerome's opinion from what is not, why do his accusers, upon occasion, deal so much with this slippery saint? Why do they depend so mightily upon his opinion, and not suspect they are in the hands of a heretic, when they are magnifying the Father?

But thirdly. Supposing such a rhapsody of indiscriminate opinions in the ancient comments, what is all this to those who are not commentators? What are opinions and notions to testimonies concerning fact? Can there be a wilder inference, than because Jerome and others, in their expositions upon Scripture, have amassed together many opinions besides their own; therefore Justin Martyr, Tertullian, and Minucius Felix, in these Apologies, concerning the faith and manners of the Christians in their time, have not written their own minds, but the opinions of other people?

But this is not all; for the Fathers are taxed with insincerity and reserve where one would be apt least of all to suspect it: these holy men, we are told, were as arrant jugglers in the pulpit, as in their commentaries; for in expounding the Scriptures to the people where the catechumens were present, if they chanced to fall upon a passage touching the sacraments,

they would make bold to wrest the text, the better to disguise these mysteries, laying before them that which they accounted not the best and truest, but what they thought best served to the purpose of amusement ; just as we please little children with an apple, or some toy, to take off the desire they have to something of greater value. The truth of the matter, as we have it from St Justin, towards the conclusion of the following Apology, in short, was only this. The catechumens were kept under strict discipline for some time, before they were admitted to the privileges of the faithful, both for their better instruction in the Christian principles, and for a trial of their sincerity ; and were the profane or uninitiated ever rashly admitted to the Pagan mysteries without any preparatory or purgation ? Does not our Master tell His apostles, "He had many things to say unto them, but they could not bear them now" ? Do not the apostles say, that "milk is for babes, and strong meat for them of full age" ? And is not this now a very notable instance of the dissimulation and tricking of the Fathers, that they took so much care about the qualifications of the new converts, in catechising and instructing them according to their capacity, in feeding them with milk, and not letting them all at once into the most sacred mysteries, as if nothing of reverence, knowledge, and probation, was required to the profession and privileges of a Christian.

But to blacken them a little more still under this head, it is farther urged, that the Fathers, in disputing with the adversaries of their faith, thought it lawful to say or conceal, or reject anything for the advancement of their cause, though otherwise true and allowable : this, I believe, is what Julian the apostate would have hardly charged upon the Christians ; for never did men keep up more strictly to the apostle's rule, of abstaining from all appearance of evil, than the ancients did ; but this is doing the grossest evil, that good may come of it. And what is stranger yet, this lie is fathered upon their pretended patron St Jerome, and justified by his authority alone, from a mighty long quotation, which to me proves nothing in the world, but only that the art of disputing is like that of fencing, where we threaten one part to hit another ; and moreover, that they often argued from the concessions of an adversary, which are a good argument, *ad hominem*, whether the concessions be true or false. But all this is so palpable a

slander, that I will not give it an answer ; these Apologies are a demonstration against it ; only one cannot but observe, how some men, to serve a cause, will stick at nothing, but write through thick and thin, and bespatter martyrs and confessors with lying for the truth, who died in the open defence of it, when they could have saved their lives for a word speaking, as you will see hereafter.

Reason 7. That the Fathers have not always held one and the same belief, but have sometimes changed some of their opinions, according as their judgment hath grown riper through study or age.

Reasons surely are very scarce things, where this is pressed to serve for one ; the reader need only see the argument naked to see its weakness, and thus it stands in form. Those men, who upon maturer deliberation, have sometimes changed some of their opinions, and consequently as they improved in years and study, might change some others, are not to be credited ; but the Fathers have so changed, &c., therefore the Fathers are not to be credited. According to this way of arguing, I say, then, excepting the Bible, there is not a creditable book in the world ; for there never was a writer, but some time or other, I believe, changed his opinion in some points. Angels then or inspired persons ought only to write books, because nothing less than infallibility ought to be a motive for belief. The objector needed not to have given himself the trouble of fouling so many pages with the errors of the ancients, for we own them to be men, and consequently as subject to mistake as death ; but the point to be proved, was, that learned and honest men who mistake in one case, are not fit to be believed in another ; that because St Austin retracted many things, therefore he is to be credited in nothing ; that because Daillé wrote a treatise of the right use of the Fathers, which in his riper judgment he seems to have retracted, or however might have done, had he lived and studied longer ; therefore nothing Daillé says is to be minded. If this consequence be just, then we ought never to read or write, or preach or believe any thing, but the express Word of God.

But 2ndly. It is here ambiguously said, that the Fathers have not always held one and the same belief ; the form of sound words, or creed, I hope they always held ; the divinity of

Christ, the necessity of church-communion, &c. Now if the Fathers were unanimous in these and other opinions; if they lived to a full ripeness of understanding, and never recanted to their dying day, is it not reasonable to conclude, that they would not have recanted had they lived longer?

3rdly. Supposing some of them not at years of discretion, or ripeness of judgment, this can only affect their reasonings, for I hope a man may hear and see as well at thirty as threescore; he can tell whether such and such writings were delivered to him for sacred Scripture; whether presbyters ordained, and held separate meetings in defiance of their bishop; whether the cross in baptism, the adoration of the sacramental elements, image worship, and the like, whether these, I say, were the practice of the Church in his time or not, any one in his senses might tell without any great perfection of judgment; or do men use to retract their testimonies about matters of fact, if they live to see and hear longer? But I am perfectly ashamed of this reason, for it proves only that nothing is too absurd for some men to question, even the whiteness of snow, or the reality of motion, when the sceptical fit is upon them. And should the supreme power proceed against the subject upon the same surmises, as these objectors do against the ancients, they might hang every man in the kingdom for murder; for it is a difficult piece of business to prove a negative, to demonstrate a man not to be a murderer, and all men are subject to sin, and it is possible, had they lived longer to consider on it, they might all have published their repentance under their own hands.

Reason 8. That it is necessary, and withal very hard to discover how the Fathers held all their opinions, whether as necessary, or probable only, and in what degree of necessity or probability.

To make this reason look the bigger, there is premised a long account of the nature of necessary and contingent propositions, for the illustration of which, we are bid to compare these two, Christ is God; and Christ suffered death, being of the age of thirty-four or thirty-five years. The former of these is necessary, because Christ could not but be God; the latter is contingent, because if He had so pleased, He might have suffered at the fortieth or fiftieth year of His age. Of these two propositions it is affirmed, that the first we cannot deny

without renouncing Christianity, but the second, though true and clearly enough collected from the Scriptures, we may deny without any great danger, as supposing it false. But, with the objector's good leave, I take this for a very bold assertion; for admitting that Christ is God, and that He suffered at such an age, to be propositions equally clear and express in Scripture, I think we are equally obliged to believe both alike, not indeed as equally necessary, but as true; because it is the Word of God which speaks in both cases; and be the matter great or small, necessary or contingent, we cannot gainsay Divine revelation, without great danger. But to our purpose, by virtue of this division into necessary and contingent, we are told how perplexed a business it is to know the sense of the Fathers, because it is necessary we should know, not only whether they believed such things or not, but also how they believed or not believed them; that is to say, whether they held them as propositions necessarily or probably, either true or false; and besides, in what degree either of necessity or probability they placed them. Now all this to me, though it may be very logical, seems very impertinent. For when our Saviour said, "Ye believed in God, believe also in Me, and do ye now believe?" does He prescribe the degrees, or weigh out the just quantity of faith they were to believe Him with? Thus again, when He puts the question to the blind man, "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" the answer is, "Lord, I believe." Here are no logical questions and answers, how and in what manner he believed; whether he held this proposition as necessary or probable, and in what degree of necessity or probability he held it; the question was simple, "Dost thou believe?" and the simple answer, "I believe," was sufficient. When the Fathers therefore tell us that such were the writings of the apostles, the doctrine, rites, customs, and polity of the Church in their time, do not we know how to understand them because we do not know how they held some opinions, whether as necessary or probable, &c.? For hold them how they will, an error in opinion can never prejudice a testimony concerning fact. Besides, with what zeal and labour did the ancients guard against Jews, heathens, and heretics? With what care and caution did they instruct the converts in all the requisites to salvation? How do they condemn all innovations in doctrine and government,

not only occasionally in their writings, but in set treatises against them? What a bulk and figure do provincial and general councils make in ecclesiastical history. How full and particular their explanations of the creed. How frequent their anathemas to the unbeliever and disobedient. How little do they insist upon their own private opinions. For instance, to name but one, does not Justin Martyr tell Trypho concerning the millenary notion, that many good Christians, in this point, were of his mind, and many not, without any reflection upon the dissenting party. And now, after all this, to object against the Fathers for not letting us know how they held their opinions, is very disingenuous, not to say dishonest; and this objection, I am afraid, falls heavier upon the apostles than their successors, who surely are more large and explicit in their expositions of the Christian religion, and in the condemnation of heresies, than the apostles were, as strange doctrines increased in every age. However, thus much is certain, stated, and definitive, that the universal church anathematized those who did not professedly believe all the articles of the Christian faith as they did; and those also who held not this unity of faith in the bond of peace, nor conformed in matters of a lower order, or attempted anything relating to the church without leave from their Bishop.

Reason 9. We ought to know what hath been the opinion, not of one or more of the Fathers, but of the whole ancient Church, which is a very hard matter to be found out.

Now this and the other two following reasons are much the same, and therefore one answer may serve for all. First then, it is so far from being a very hard matter, that, to a willing mind, it is wondrous easy to find out what hath been the opinion, not of one or more of the Fathers, but of the whole ancient Church, in all points necessary to salvation; and what are not so are not necessary to be known. Moreover, it is allowed that Justin Martyr and others could not be ignorant what was the public doctrine of the Church, and that they heartily and constantly embraced it: but the mischief of it is, that they took the liberty to treat of matters not determined by general councils, or delivered in any of the creeds, &c. This, no doubt, was scurvily done of the Fathers, that they should offer to give us their sense of Scripture, of apostolic rites and customs, and confute and condemn heresies, or treat of any

thing not within the express determination of the whole ancient Church. But why might not they take the liberty which every modern commentator takes now-a-days? Does Daillé keep within the bounds he prescribes the ancients; and in his abuse of the Fathers and other writings, deliver nothing save what the Church has clearly delivered its judgment upon? Well, but what must those do who chanced to live before general councils were to be had? Why, even nothing that I know of, but read the sacred text, and religiously abstain from all commenting, or delivering any opinions, but what are contained in express words of Scripture; and consequently it was mighty ill done of that disciple of St John, the bishop and martyr Ignatius, to write his epistles, and among other speculations to deliver as his opinion, that the laity were to be obedient to their bishop, as Christ Jesus was to the Father; and to the presbytery as to the apostles; and to reverence the deacons, as the ordinance of God, before he was sure of this nice point from the resolution of the whole ancient Church, all which was little enough to make the distasteful notion relish. However, thus much is certain, that the interpretations and testimonies of the earliest Fathers (many of which are now lost) were the great helps and authorities which posterity in councils proceeded on in condemning heresies, establishing creeds, and settling the canon of Scripture.

But secondly, to put the difficulty of knowing the sense of the Church universal in the saddest colours, we are told that particular churches have had great differences in opinions and customs, and therefore it is a very disputable point, which of the differing churches were in the right; I grant it, and say again, that if the difference be not about fundamentals, we may be securely ignorant. Does the Church of England build any more upon these disputable opinions than her adversaries? Or does their difference in some things affect their credibility in all? What if they did disagree about the observation of Easter, a business confessedly of no great importance, and wherein, as I have shewn, both parties might be in the right, as to the apostolic practice, are we not therefore to believe them about episcopacy, wherein they are all unanimous? I grant again, that the fast of Lent was differently observed in divers churches, and say with our own article, that it is not necessary that traditions and ceremonies be in all places one and utterly alike; and that every particular or national Church hath authority to ordain, change

and abolish ceremonies or rites of the Church ordained only by men's authority, so that all things be done to edifying.

Lastly, to advance one step higher, we are told that it is not only difficult, but "impossible to know exactly what the belief of the ancient Church, either universal or particular, hath been touching any of those points now in controversy among us."

For to know this, according to his definition of a Church, we must know, it seems, either the opinion of every individual member of that Church, or of its representatives, that is to say, the clergy. Now to know the belief of the Church in the first sense, he with great variety of harangue has shewn to be impossible, and therefore, say I, needless; just as needless, as to visit every hospital, and to consult the politics of every member in Bedlam, in order to know exactly the strength and wisdom of the nation. And our censor, after he has eased himself of his wit for some pages, confesses as much, viz. that it is not necessary that we should know the opinions, in points of religion, of all particular persons, which are almost infinite in number, and for the most part very ill grounded and uncertain; but that it is sufficient if we know what the belief hath been of the pastors, that is to say, of the Church, taken in the latter sense. Now, as in the former case, he was forced to be a little severe upon the people, for the good of his argument, so here again to ingratiate, he makes them full amends, and according to method, whips the clergy upon the back of the people; "for it cannot be denied," says he, "that both ignorance and malice have oftentimes as great a share here, proportionably, as they have among the very people itself; and that there are sometimes found, even among the plain ordinary sort of Christians in a church, those that are more considerable both for their learning and piety, than the pastors themselves." And here he runs the same lengths again to prove the pastors more divided in their opinions than the people, and makes it a wonder, "if where four clergymen, of the more learned and politer sort were met together, two of them should not upon some point or other of the faith, differ in judgment from the main body of their Church." But now this great master of controversy himself should have told us, whether the belief of such opinions is necessary, and if it is, which way we are to take in this diversity of disputes, where neither priest nor people is to

be trusted ; but if we may safely suspend our faith amidst these differences, why all this pother about them to no purpose ? I would ask likewise this persecutor of the ancients, whether he thinks there were any among the plain ordinary sort of Christians in the Churches of Antioch or Smyrna, more considerable, both for their learning and piety, than Ignatius or Polycarp ? Whether those set over the flock of Christ by His apostles, who had the gift of discerning spirits for this very purpose, were sufficiently qualified for the cure of souls ; and whether they did faithfully discharge that office ; and if so, whether the same faith and practice will not carry us as securely to heaven, as our forefathers ; and whether all necessary points were not yet more fully treated, stated, and defined by succeeding writers and councils, and the primitive pens continually drawn against every invasion of the Faith ? And what now would our modern waspish critics have ? Would they have more of the Fathers, than to give an account of the doctrines, manners, rites, and customs of the Church in their time, and of what they learned from credible traditions, and other authentic records and writings then extant ? Why yes truly, they would have more ; they would have them, it seems, have written set tracts against the Pope's supremacy, transubstantiation, &c., that is, of controversies, many hundred years before they had a being ; for touching any of the questions now on foot, the Fathers are silent, and therefore of no use ; and yet when these gentlemen are in the vein of writing against the corruptions of Rome, then this very silence is judged a good negative argument against them ; and it is urged, and justly too, that no article ought now to be imposed as necessary, which was unheard of in the purest times of Christianity.

After all, this reason can affect notions only and opinions, and not testimonies about fact, which are the main things we depend upon the Fathers for ; for when Justin Martyr tells me, upon his own knowledge, "that the Christians in his time met all together upon Sunday, and had common prayer, and lessons out of the Scriptures, after which the president made a sermon, and administered the Eucharist in both kinds to the people, and mingled the wine with water," &c., I may take the martyr's word for this, I hope, without turning over every individual writer of that age. Or suppose the Fathers which are

extant tell me, such were the writings of the apostles ; is it reasonable to reject their testimony ? Because, forsooth, " it is possible that others might have held the contrary, though they did not write in defence of it ; or because, perhaps, they might have written in defence of it, and their books have been since lost ; for how small is the number of those in the Church who had the ability, or at least the will to write ? And how much smaller is the number of those whose writings have been able to secure themselves either against the injury of time, or the malice of men ? " And where shall we ever fix, if such imaginations may pass for arguments ?

These are all the reasons under the first general ; and a man must be in mighty want of reasons, to call in the lame and the blind at this rate to his assistance ; for a greater waste of good words, with less argument, is hardly to be met with than in this concluding chapter.

The second general objection is, that the Fathers are not sufficient authority for the deciding of our controversies in religion. And the first particular reason for this is, that the testimonies given by the Fathers touching the belief of the Church, are not always true and certain.

Now not to disturb the critic in dream, in his imaginary triumphs upon the last engagement, let us take a view of his new raised forces ; and the ground his first reason is bottomed upon is this : that matter of fact being of a more compounded, and consequently more perplexed nature than matter of right, the Fathers possibly may have erred, in giving us an account hereof ; and that therefore their testimonies in such cases ought not to be received by us as infallibly true ; neither yet may we be thought hereby to accuse the Fathers of falsehood ; for how often do the honestest persons that are, innocently testify such things as they thought they had seen, which it afterwards appeareth that they saw not at all ; for goodness renders not men infallible. Now for my part, I have been always so silly, as to think a matter of sense, of sight especially, no such perplexed matter ; and to see a king *de facto* full as easy, as to know a king *de jure*. If goodness then will not render them infallible, I hope it may render them credible witnesses of fact, or else why do we receive the canon of Scripture upon testimony ? Or where shall we find a credible witness upon earth, if to be so, he must needs be infallible ? The point

then here to have been laboured, had been to have proved the Fathers all out of their senses, or rather not to have been men, but drills, weweenas, cuchepies, or cousedas; and then their business had been done effectually all at once, and their testimony quite destroyed, as being not human. And this, by the help of the modern philosophy, had been no hard matter; for it had been only supposing the eyes and the ears of these Fathers to have been a little out of the shape, and the fashion of modern eyes and ears, and then to be sure they had been all drills; and this had been but a very reasonable supposition, since none of them, it seems, could see and hear well enough to be believed. The instances produced to invalidate the testimony of the ancients, are some philosophical disputes about the creation or traduction of human souls, the corporeity of angels, and such-like speculations, to which it will be time enough to return an answer, when either of them are proved to have been stated doctrines of the Church.

Reason 2. The Fathers themselves testify against themselves, that they are not to be believed absolutely, and upon their own bare word in what they deliver in matters of religion.

Well, and were not the Fathers very honest folks for thus testifying against themselves? In this I hope their testimony may be taken, and that they may pass for credible, though they confess themselves fallible. But notwithstanding this fallibility, do they anywhere declare that they are not to be believed upon their own bare word, in what they deliver about matter of fact? As for making their notions canonical, and as absolutely conclusive as sacred Scripture; let those who do it, answer for it. But for us, we look upon the divinely-inspired writings only, as binding in themselves; and upon the Fathers, as much better qualified for the interpretation of the Scriptures, than the moderns; who, though in truth such pigmies, are yet so tall in imagination, as to fancy they can take a nicer view of the sacred text merely upon their own legs, than upon the shoulders of the ancients. In all this chapter, therefore, the author is fighting only with giants of his own making, where he is amassing together numerous quotations, heaps upon heaps, only to prove that the opinions of the Fathers are no farther binding, than as they are consonant either to Scripture or reason; and consequently, that they ought to be examined by the one and the other, as pro-

ceeding from persons that are not infallible, but possibly may have erred. For which reason he expresses his displeasure against "the course which is at this day observed in the world for the discovery of Divine truth; for we are now in doubt, suppose, what the sense and meaning of such a piece of Scripture; here," says he, "shall you presently have the judgment of a Father brought upon the said place, quite contrary to the rule St Austin giveth us, who would have us examine the Fathers by the Scriptures, and not the Scriptures by the Fathers." Now this method of coming at the sense of Scripture, which he is so much disgusted at, seems to me the best of methods; what St Austin himself took, and what he advises: for this Father was not so much a child, as to advise men to search the Scriptures for the sense of the Fathers, but to search them in order to see whether the doctrine of the Fathers was not agreeable to that of the apostles. And therefore all this outcry against appealing from God to man, from Scripture to the ancients, is mere paralogism; for the appeal is only to the best human judges, about the meaning of the Word of God.

Reason 3. It appeareth plainly by their manner of writing, that the Fathers never intended that their writings should be our judges in matters of religion.

This is chiefly grounded upon St Jerome's saying, "That he had allotted himself but three days for the translating of the three books of Solomon, viz., Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Canticles; and that he never did anything almost but in haste, and at full speed; and whoever heard a judge excuse himself by reason of the shortness of time," &c. From St Jerome's writing so frequently in haste, all I can conclude is, that he wrote with less accuracy and embellishment than otherwise he would have done; but the question is not about delicacy of expression, but truth; and if St Jerome was an honest man (as I hope his greatest admirers will not deny), he would certainly take care, though in haste, to write truly, if not finely, or else not to write at all. Secondly, supposing St Jerome did write in haste, what is this to those saints who never offer to excuse themselves upon the same topic? But they do not deliver themselves with the air and authority of a judge, and therefore perhaps their writings are not to be looked upon as definitive. But are not ambassadors to produce their credentials, and judges their commission, before they act in the

quality of either? Christ and His apostles first justify their mission by miracles, and then teach as having authority; and though they did not argue with swords and staves, and burn men to make them believers, yet when they had professed the faith, the professors were punished for disobedience, and Ananias and Sapphira had not suffered, had they made no pretensions to Christianity.

Thus, in these Apologies, we find a summary of the Christian faith, and a challenge to justify it by miracle; "that if they did not cast out evil spirits in the name of their Master, and make those very spirits proclaim themselves devils in the presence of the whole Senate who worshipped them for gods, they were willing to be proceeded against as cheats with the utmost severity." And was not this miracle the same proof of Divine authority in them, as in the apostles? They laugh indeed at compulsion upon the understanding, but yet are for correcting an unruly will, and for reducing offenders to a better mind and sense of their offences, by a severe course of discipline and penance; and therefore, though they argue only with the heathen from reason, Scripture, and miracle, yet when converted, they exhort and rebuke, catechise, admit, and eject them with the authority of spiritual judges; and nothing was done in the primitive Church without the bishop's order. Did not the first General Councils deliver themselves with the air and authority of judges? Or did they draw up their creeds and canons in haste, and exhibit them only as probable propositions, and no farther binding than as they seemed reasonable to the people? Or did they not affix their anathemas, and urge the belief of them under pain of damnation? And therefore to say, that the Fathers did not write as judges, because they did not write themselves infallible; and to rake up every seeming error to show their infirmity, is in effect to say nothing, but only, that to be judges, men must be infallible. If this author means (as he seems to do) that the writings of the Fathers are not of equal authority with those of the apostles, he argues against nobody; for had our reformers been of this opinion, we had had them all translated into English, and read in our churches upon the same foot with the Bible; for every divinely-inspired writing is of the same authority.

The fourth and fifth reasons are, that many of the Fathers

have erred in divers points of religion : and moreover, strongly contradicted one another, and maintained different opinions, in matters of very great importance.

These two reasons might have been put together, but for the more diversion with these holy men, they are divided, and fill up two long chapters. However, he puts on the face of a mourner, and with an air of pity and compassion calls the world to witness, how much it goes to his heart to rip up the errors of these learned and pious souls, but that truth and justice ought to prevail above all other considerations ; and then asking their pardon, the critic proceeds to execution, and gives them his blow of grace. But in truth, the poor man had been undone, but for some mistakes of the Fathers, for finding fault is his meat and drink ; and how much he loves to feed upon corruptions of the best kind, we may see by the following mess. For here we have a dish of all their several errors in grammar, history, philosophy, chronology, geography, astronomy, and what not ; some of which, perhaps, may be errors, some are in dispute at this day, but most of them cleared up and vindicated by critics of another sort. But alas ! may not a man be orthodox, without being an astronomer, or a good Christian, without being a good musician ? Or is there any consequence in this ? The Fathers have erred in grammar, therefore they have erred in faith. Had this gentleman, in one of his critical fits, thought good to let fly against the divinely-inspired writings, he could have made as merry with Moses, as he has done with the Fathers, for calling the moon one of the great lights ;¹ and for telling us of " waters above the firmament," and of the " windows of heaven ;" he could have exposed Joshua's ignorance for bidding the sun stand still, and David's too, for saying that the " sun rejoiceth as a giant to run his course ;" whereas, according to the Copernican system, the sun is demonstrably the centre of the world. He would have pitied the weakness of the holy men of old, for talking of the end, sides, and corners of the earth, whereas all the modern sons of science know it to be spherical. He could have been very witty likewise upon the mistake in the Kings and Chronicles,² about the measure of Solomon's brazen sea, whose diameter is said to be ten cubits, and its circumference thirty ; whereas every modern geometrician knows, that the more

¹ Gen. i. 16.

² 1 Kings vii. 23 ; 2 Chron. iv. 2.

exact proportion between the diameter and the circumference, is not as ten to thirty, but rather as seven to twenty-two. And so again, for chronology and arithmetic, he could have flourished upon the errors of the sacred writers in these respects, and told us how in some places,¹ the posterity of Abraham is said to have sojourned in the land of Egypt four hundred years; whereas other Scriptures² tell us that they stayed thirty years longer; and thus in one passage,³ the number of Jacob's house, who came into Egypt, is computed to be seventy, whereas elsewhere⁴ they are said to be seventy-five. But here the answer is short and sufficient, that the Scripture was not designed to make us philosophers, but only wise unto salvation, and therefore speaks not exactly according to the philosophic, but popular account of things; and so here in numbering of Jacob's house, conforms to the common way of using a round number for the whole. Since the Holy Ghost was not pleased totally to exempt the sacred penman from all kinds of insignificant error, this busy person methinks might have spared the ancients for the like, and covered them with the excuse of Acosta, "*Facile condonandum est patribus, si cum cognoscendo colendoc; Creatori toti vacarent, de Creaturâ minus aptè aliquâ ex parti opinati sunt.*" The Fathers are very pardonable for not having such exact and adequate notions about the creature, considering they gave up themselves entirely to the knowledge and worship of the Creator. But this is not all, for we are told, that the Fathers have strongly contradicted one another, and maintained different opinions in matters of very great importance. Now these matters of very great importance have been often served up before, but to give us an utter surfeit of the Fathers, they are brought to table again; and they are such as these: the various opinions about the millennium, the observation of Easter Day, the infusion or generation of the soul, the reality of Samuel's ghost, the fast on Saturdays, the age of Christ, the procession of the Holy Ghost, &c. All which are questions problematical, such as were and are differently maintained to this day, and with innocence; of which a Christian may be safely ignorant without any danger to his faith. As to the procession of the Holy Ghost, which at first sight seems the most

¹ Gen. xv. 13; Acts vii. 6.

² Exod. xii. 41; Gal. iii. 17.

³ Gen. xlvi. 27.

⁴ Acts vii. 14.

shocking difference, it is in truth to as little purpose as any of the rest; for whoever believes a trinity of Divine persons in the unity of the Godhead, or one essence, believes sufficient, without more explicit notions of the modes of the eternal generation and procession, which are mysteries beyond the depth of any created intellect: and I must needs say, that it had been much better, if some great men had only proved the matter of fact, viz., that such an article is express in Scripture, and attested by all the first Catholic writers, and so left it as a doctrine incomprehensible. And now after all these good endeavours to render the Fathers contemptible, I answer first, that supposing them to contradict one another strongly in some points, we lay not any stress upon these contradictory opinions. Secondly, this very contradiction in matters of little or no moment, is a very good reason to believe them where they are all unanimous, it being from hence evident that they wrote not by compact, but purely for the sake of truth. Thirdly, they are all of a mind in the great fundamental articles of the Christian faith, though they should differ in the manner of explication, and use some expressions with less guard and caution, before heresies gave occasion to speak and define more strictly. And lastly, errors in opinion ought never to unqualify honest men for witnesses of fact.

The sixth and last reason is, that neither those of the Church of Rome, nor the Protestants, do acknowledge the Fathers for their judges in points of religion, but do both of them reject such of their opinions and practices as are not for their gust.

As for those of the Church of Rome, it is a shrewd sign, we say, that they are conscious of the weakness of their cause, that they will not stand the test of antiquity: but for our own reformers, sure I am, that they declined not the trial, but appealed to the judgment of the Fathers, not only (as this author would have it) for the confutation of Romish novelties, but also for the establishment of their own doctrines. And though they did not look upon them as infallible, yet they looked upon them as the best appointed judges since the apostles, which is all we contend for. For it is not the part of a judge, (as the objector seems all along to suppose) to make laws, but to interpret those already made. And therefore, though I

grant him, that the Scripture contains all things necessary both for the service of God, and the salvation of men's souls, yet I deny his consequence, that therefore nothing else is necessary; for he himself must allow, strength of reason and application, a great skill in Greek, in the customs and controversies of the apostolic age, with an unbiassed will, to be necessary qualifications for understanding the Gospel, or else that all men are judges alike; and therefore say I, no men so well accomplished for interpreters of Scripture, as those who sat at the feet of the apostles, or their immediate successors, and spoke the language, and lived among the customs, and minded nothing else but to know Christ and Him crucified, supposing them without the extraordinary assistances of the Spirit in those extraordinary times of suffering. I grant likewise this gentleman his fine similes, that brooks of water, the farther distant they are from their springs, the more filth they contract; and that a man in years loses a great deal of infant simplicity; and for this very reason conclude, that the Christian religion runs purer, and shines with more native beauty and apostolical plainness in the writers of the first four centuries, than in those of the succeeding and more corrupted ages.

And moreover, supposing a falling away, even in the sense of this author, yet the apostles who forewarned this apostasy, forearmed no doubt against it; and the best provision against it, was to set up not only pious and orthodox, but prudent and active bishops over the several churches they founded; men not taken up with the little things of this world, and with their faces towards Jerusalem, and yet for the worship upon Mount Gerizim, but such as would contend earnestly for the faith, polity, and discipline, which was once delivered unto the saints, and in all things moderate, but in the grand concerns of God and religion: now about the choice of such bishops, the apostles who could discern spirits could not be ignorant; and such consequently was St Ignatius, when he was set over Antioch by St John; and continuing faithful to the day of his martyrdom, what reason can there be to question the purity of his doctrine, though the mystery of iniquity was then a working? And if I cannot question him as a doctor, much less surely can I question him as a witness of fact; for a man of integrity, I hope, may be a competent witness in any age. So that he who urges the falling away of some, against

the belief of others, may with the like reason urge the apostasy of Judas against the credibility of St Paul.

I will not go about to pursue this writer through all his wood of quotations, to shew only how both Protestants and Papists have taken the liberty of departing from the ancients, in opinion, ceremony, and discipline; for granting all he contends for, I say, first, that in all necessary points of doctrine and church government, we hold with the primitive Christians. Secondly, in some ceremonies we differ, and this too by authority and example of the ancients; though I cannot but think that the more we all conform to the pattern of the Catholic Church in the eldest and purest times, even in the externals of worship, so much the better, so much the more cordial our love and union, the more beauty, order, and harmony, the more like children of the same family, and servants of the same master. Thirdly, as to discipline; and in this indeed, I cannot say, we so much differ from the ancients, as that we have none at all: for of old, all notorious offenders of what quality soever, were immediately censured and separated from the faithful, and by them so strictly avoided, not only in this or that particular church, but all Christendom over, that shame and solitude brought them to a sense of their evil ways, and forced them to submit to a long and severe course of penance; and happy did they think themselves at last, if with prayers and tears they might be admitted to the peace of God and the church again; such was the primitive way of reducing sinners to consideration and amendment, many of whom had lived on without reflection till the day of their death, might they have passed uncensured as in these times of relaxation; and had the church never called in the assistance of the State, but kept the powers distinct, and acted solely within her spiritual jurisdiction, and gravely, maturely, and constantly, proceeded against scandalous offenders; I can see no reason why her censures should not be as much dreaded now, as in her first state of independence and persecution; and the power of the keys, I believe, had been more venerable without the axe of the magistrate; but by mixing powers, the spiritual one, by degrees is well nigh quite swallowed up, and it is the grand question now-a-days, whether the Church has any inherent power of her own, but only as she is authorised from the State, that is, whether bishops ceased not

to be bishops after Constantine's conversion, or the sacerdotal power devolved not upon the civil magistrate upon his turning Christian? If then the number or quality of offenders is by long remissness grown too great for censure, if for fear of bearing too hard upon dissenters, the Church cannot proceed against the grossest sinners, or obey the canon in refusing the sacrament to a schismatic without incurring the penalty of the law, it is not that we dislike the discipline of the ancients, but that our circumstances will not admit of it, and we hope our calamity will not be our crime; until then the said primitive discipline be restored again, (which we say is much to be wished) we must be sure to wait God's good time with the primitive patience, and declare God's wrath against sinners, where we cannot, like the ancients, enforce it. For according to Bernard, "We ought not to omit what we can do, because we cannot do as we ought."

And now I have done with the seventeen reasons of the celebrated Mr Daillé against the use and authority of the Fathers, and do hope that this short answer may serve for an antidote against the poison of that long and spiteful book; and by this time, I daresay, that the reader, as well as myself, has taken a surfeit of reasons. But neither one nor the other had been troubled with so many particulars, had not I found most of the arguments revived of late, and reinforced with fresh supplies, not only to invalidate their reasonings and testimonies in the point of episcopacy, but in many other unhappy differences between us and our dissenting brethren: and because I would do justice to the memory of those saints and martyrs, who deserved much better treatment from the Christian world; and, moreover, because I would make way for cultivating the study of the ancients, and for more translations of this kind. For were the writings the Fathers, such as they are here represented, the reader, but especially the translator, ought both to be sent to the workhouse for better employment. But whoever loves the sport, will soon find wit and dirt enough to bespatter, and something to pin upon the wisest and best man living, to set children and fools a-laughing. Let him but, in imitation of Mr Daillé, describe Noah only by his drunkenness, or David by his adultery, or Peter by his denial; let him but draw a shade over the wisdom, goodness, or beauty of the most perfect in their kind, and lay on his colours purely upon

their follies, vices, and blemishes, and we shall not find one wise, good, or beautiful person in the world. It is a much easier matter to cut than cure, to be witty than wise, and a very ordinary hand will serve to deface, what a Pearson or a Grabe only can restore and beautify. And now after all his pains, and ambitious ornaments, to dress up the Fathers once more in the skins of wild beasts, and to martyr them over again, I think I cannot do better than to shut up their character in the words of their enemy.

“First of all, therefore,” says he, “you shall find in the Fathers, very many earnest and zealous exhortations to holiness of life, and to the observation of the discipline of Jesus Christ. Secondly, you shall there meet with very strong and solid proofs of those fundamental principles of our religion, touching which we are all agreed : and also many excellent things laid open, tending to the right understanding of these mysteries ; and also of the Scriptures wherein they are contained. In this very particular their authority may be of good use unto you, and may serve as a probable argument of the truth. For is it not a wonderful thing to see, that so many great wits, born in so many several ages, during the space of fifteen hundred years, and in so many several countries, being also of so different tempers, and who in other things were of so contrary opinions, should notwithstanding, be found all of them to agree so constantly and unanimously in the fundamentals of Christianity ; that amidst so great diversity in worship, they all adore one and the same Christ ; preach one and the same sanctification ; hope all of them for one and the same immortality ; acknowledge all of them the same Gospels ; find therein all of them great and high mysteries ;” and I take the liberty to add, live under one and the same form of church government, “for, I beseech you, what probability is there, that so many holy men, who were endued (as it appeareth by their writings) with such admirable parts, with so much strength and clearness of understanding, should all of them be so grossly overseen, as to set so high a price and esteem upon this discipline, as to suffer even to death for it ; unless it had in it some certain heavenly virtue, for to make an impression in the souls of men ? What likelihood, that seven or eight dogs, and as many atheistical hogs, that bark and grunt so sottishly and confusedly against this sacred and venerable religion, should have better luck in

lighting upon the truth, than so many excellent men, who have so unanimously borne testimony to the truth? What wonder is it if a whoremaster, or a bawd, or an ambitious person cry down that discipline, that condemneth these vices to everlasting fire? To take any notice of what such wretched things as these say, is all one, as if you should judge, by taking the opinion of common strumpets, of the equity or injustice of the laws that enjoin people to live honest. But seeing these holy men were born and brought up in the very same infirmities with the others; we cannot doubt but that they also naturally had strong inclinations to those vices, which our Saviour Christ forbiddeth, and very little affection to those virtues He commandeth. Forasmuch, therefore, as notwithstanding all this, they have yet all of them constantly maintained that His doctrine is true; their testimony certainly in this case neither can, nor ought in any wise to be suspected. So that although they had not any of those great and incomparable advantages of parts and learning, above the enemies of Christianity; their bare word, however, is much rather to be taken than the others; seeing that these men are manifestly carried away by the force of their vile affections, of which the other cannot possibly be suspected guilty."

But besides this, he allows another very considerable use of the Fathers, namely, that upon the broaching of any new doctrines as necessary to be believed, the ancients may be properly and seasonably appealed to, against the impudence of such innovators; and if it can be proved, that the Fathers were utterly ignorant of any such fancies, as these men propose to the world, "we ought then certainly to conclude, that no such doctrine was ever preached to mankind; either by our Saviour Christ, or by His apostles. For what probability is there, that these holy doctors of former ages, from whose hands Christianity has been derived down unto us, should be ignorant of any of those things which had been revealed and recommended by our Saviour, as important and necessary to salvation?" So that after all this clutter of objections, we have at length the objector granting, that the Fathers were warm and excellent preachers and livers of the pure Christian religion; and indubitable proofs of the truth of it, and incomparably qualified for the understanding its mysteries, and also of the Scriptures wherein they are contained; and withal, an

undeniable answer to all novelties, as necessary articles ; and if so, then I have all I have been contending for, and from the mouth of Mr Daillé ; "and certainly," says Tertullian, "we may believe the evil spirits upon their word, when they confess against themselves."

I come now in the last place to show some of the unhappy consequences of too lightly departing from the Fathers.

Though all the necessary foundations of faith and manners are plainly laid down in the gospel, though the apostles, no doubt, instructed their successors in many particulars about the government and discipline of the Church, which we find not in the gospel ; yet certain it is, that they raised not the structure to that height and beauty, and set everything in that perfection of order they would have done, had the civil power been on their side ; for we find disorders and heresies putting forth even in the apostolic age. However, notwithstanding these spots and imperfections, the Church was purer and more perfect by much in her infancy, than in her declining age. This, I say, is evident in fact, from the testimony of all sorts of writers at that time ; and that it must have been so, as is evident for these two reasons : First, that the Church was then in a state of persecution ; and it is not the way of flesh and blood, for such veterans in wickedness as have always been in the service of the world and the lusts thereof, to come over to a persecuted religion, and to quit their present possessions for a happiness in reversion they could not relish. Secondly, the discipline of the Church was then severe and searching ; and if her purity and affliction could not defend her from occasional friends, her rod soon found them out, and drove them from her communion. But after the emperors came to submit to the cross, and the beauty of preferment shone full in the eyes of the preachers ; when peace, and plenty, and court favours invited warmly on one hand, and the sword of discipline was sheathing up on the other, then abuses came pouring in amain, and propagated in abundance, till at length the Church was overflowed with that deluge of corruption we found it under at the time of Reformation. If then from testimony, and for these two reasons, besides those already mentioned, the primitive Church must have been comparatively the purest and most perfect in all respects, then the departing too lightly from

such a Church, must needs be attended with very ill consequences; for when we lay aside our rule, there is no end of error; the effects of which, I shall touch upon in these following particulars, doctrine, holiness, unity and discipline.

And first, as to doctrine. The many different Confessions of Faith now abroad in the world, are a manifest proof that all are not in the right, unless they can differ and be in the right both together. And as heresies increased, so creeds were enlarged by a fuller and more express provision against them; and for this reason we may conclude, that fewer heresies arose in the western than eastern churches, because the Roman symbol continued longest in its original simplicity. But now that Church which boasts of infallibility, is fullest of error; how is the faithful city become an harlot? And how like one too does she varnish over her adulteries with the colour of antiquity, and after all, wipe her mouth, and say, I have done no wickedness? And how came this work of darkness to its present bulk and enormity, but by closeting and corrupting the Fathers, by expurgations, interpolations, traditions, and what not? Might but the Scriptures have continued the rule of faith, and the ancients the judges of the sense of that rule, we had never had as many mediators in Christian, as heathen Rome, nor purgatory, nor private masses, nor angel-saint image, or relic worship, and many other profitable absurdities canonized for articles, though unheard of in the purest ages of the Church; but this is too large a field.

And as the Papists have killed the prophets, and garnished their sepulchres, murdered the ancients with all the show of reverence for antiquity; so on the contrary, others have set up their idol reason in open defiance of their authority. For Socinus talking of his huge skill in divinity, values himself extremely for having no other master but his Uncle Lælius, or rather some very few of his writings, with plenty of his remarks, for his whole stock of instruction. And what was the effect of this mighty genius's setting up in divinity upon his own and his uncle's stock of reason only, in defiance of the Fathers? Why, he made a shift to reason himself out of his Christianity and his senses into this notable absurdity, viz., to make Christ a mere man, and yet to worship Him as a God; and to exclude the Holy Ghost, in whose name we

are baptized, out of the Godhead. By scorning authorities, and dint of free thinking, he came to that prodigious pitch above the ancients, as to make a new discovery of the rights of the Christian Church, and has left noble hints for his sons of reason to finish, for the improvement of the present age. For this enemy of the ever blessed Trinity says, "there is no scruple to be made but the sacrament of the Lord's Supper may be celebrated by any company of men professing the name of Christ," though the Scripture I think is express, that no man taketh this honour to himself, but he that is called of God as Aaron was.

He makes no scruple likewise to declare water baptism no lasting precept, nor ever enjoined either by Christ or His apostles to such as had any way declared publicly for Christ, or been brought up in His religion from their childhood. As to those precepts and declarations in Scripture, such as, "Go ye therefore, and disciple all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:" "He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved:" "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven:" "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins," &c. These and many more like passages, as express as words can well be for the necessity of water baptism, and always so understood by the first Catholic writers, who constantly interposed a considerable time between the catechetical instructions, and the baptism of adult persons; these, I say, are all eluded by Socinus, being content with himself alone in matters of history; who resolves the baptism in the places just cited, partly into a mere ablution of the soul, or inward washing away of sins by repentance, and partly evades the necessity of baptism by making the precept neither universal nor perpetual; and all this for fear of coming to a confession of original sin, which your great pretenders to reason are not fond of; so hard a thing is it to find any text plain enough for some men, who affect to lose themselves in a new way, rather than to go right in an old one with company.

Thus again Episcopius and Curcellæus, men of fine parts, of subact judgment, and great politeness, but both too great strangers to the Fathers, have well-nigh trod in the steps of Socinus in most of the foregoing errors; for by overlooking

all that is primitive, the universal consent of the earliest doctors in their writings, and the most solemn determinations of their successors in councils, and by presuming upon waxen wings, mere reason only, in the highest mystery, they signalled their rashness by falling into fatal mistakes even in matters of faith; for they argued against the necessity of believing God the Son to be of the same substance with God the Father, and find fault with the word *ὁμοούσιον*, as a bone of contention, a novel term, and not in use before the Nicene Council. But if Christ be not of the same substance with the Father, He must be a creature, and then it must be a breach of the first commandment to worship Him as a God. Besides, the stupendousness of the Father's love emphatically consists herein, that He sent His only begotten Son, not one made of a virgin only for that purpose, but the Son of His bosom and essence, to save sinners. And herein also consists the exceeding philanthropy of Christ, that being God of God before all worlds, He would descend to take upon Him our nature, and to suffer in it for our sins; for had He been a mere man only, what wonder, if He was contented to suffer as He did, to be exalted as He is. So that the Divine economy, and the whole mystery of our redemption, is debased and vilified to the lowest degree, by the not belief of this article. And therefore the Nicene Fathers had great reason to contend so earnestly for the consubstantiality of the Son, and to make use of the term they did, which is fully expressive of Christ's divinity, and used too by the Fathers before that Council, as our most learned Bishop Bull has sufficiently proved against Episcopius; which treatise had he lived to see, I verily believe, would have convinced him of the vanity of his reasoning, and his want of antiquity. Thus again, others of fresher date, by leaning solely upon their own understandings, and the advantage of clear ideas, would prove Christianity not mysterious, and contract the twelve articles of the Apostles' Creed into one, and that too a very ambiguous one, namely, that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ or Messiah, that is, the Anointed of the Lord, or an extraordinary person sent from God. Nor am I much surprised to find the great author of the reasonableness of Christianity so sparing of his faith, and peculiar in his notions of religion, (to say no worse of it) when I find him so great a stranger to Christian antiquity, as

to beg his friend's information, Whether any miracles were done after the times of the apostles. I am very willing to believe Mr Lock's sincerity for truth, but by his letters lately published, one would be apt to imagine that he and Philip a Limbourgh, Le Clerc, and a few others, were the only persons in reality concerned for truth. But I hope the martyrs were as much concerned for truth as the Lockites, and therefore to set aside the ancients' creeds, and to substitute a single article of his own head in contempt of the Fathers, and at every turn to drop the most spiteful reflections upon the Christian priesthood; this, I say, in my opinion, does not so well comport with that candour and impartiality for truth they so liberally bestow upon each other in these epistles. And had they spent more time upon the Fathers, I dare say, they had not been worse reasoners, nor worse Christians.

But thus it will always be, when men will be wise by themselves alone, and measure Divine truth by their line of reason; there will be nothing but tinkering in matters of religion, and perpetual mending of creeds, when the only thing to be mended is their manners. Which brings me to the second ill effect of departing from the Fathers, and that is, in the point of holiness.

Whoever reads over these Apologies, and compares them with the fifth of St Matthew, will find the hardest lines in that chapter, in the lives of the primitive Christians; loving, praying, and doing good under the bitterest provocations: chastity and temperance, purity and patience, poverty and thankfulness, courage and non-resistance, were the virtues they preached and practised in the plain sense, and up to the full extent of the letter, without shifting and doubling distinctions and evasions, to put a trick upon the precepts, and satisfy the law and their lusts into the bargain. These persecuted people had the same self-preservation, the same force of appetite, and the same reluctances in nature as we have, and therefore no doubt made as careful inquiries into the extent and obligation of these grim duties as we can do. And we have our Master's Word, that people so disposed to do the will of His Father, shall know of the doctrine and its meaning, whether it be from God, much better than those, who study the Scriptures, as some do the statute book, only to avoid the penalties; not so much for going to heaven, as for not going to hell. These are

the students that are so against the Fathers, because the Fathers are so against them. The lives and interpretations of martyrs, the zeal and stiffness of those hardy inflexible Christians are severe and frightful things, nor do comport well with times of suppleness and compliance with whatever sort of religion. The principles of Christian morality were then fixed and indisputable; and though briars and thorns were with them, and they dwelt among scorpions, yet without mincing the matter, they delivered the most unpalatable truths in the most persecuting times, and were themselves the examples of what they taught. But now we have so many questions and quirks, not only about the practice, but even the theory of holiness, that men hardly know what either to believe or practise. For we have burning heretics, and deposing princes, for gospel; penance, and pilgrimage for real holiness; we have faith without works, saints without morality, and morality without faith; Christianity without sacraments, a church without a priesthood, communion without unity, and loyalty without obedience. These are some of the ill consequences of depending upon ourselves only, of reasoning from Scripture with the practice of the ancients, whose writings Providence has spared us for our instruction and example; the neglect of which, I take to be both a cause of our unholiness, and an aggravation of our sin.

Another ill effect of not knowing, or at least of not regarding primitive Christianity, is the want of union and order. "By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples," says our Master, "if ye love one another;" and, "see how these Christians love one another," was the heathen proverb in the time of Tertullian. Love and union was then the badge or phylactery that distinguished the Christian sect from all others. The Church of Christ was then a well-regulated society, like a natural body, wherein all the members maintain their respective relation, and act in a due subordination to, and dependence upon one another; no dispute or schism about fundamentals of faith or government arose in any church, but they all sympathised as members of the same body, and bewailed it universally, and forthwith applied all the lenitives of persuasion to heal the breach; and if these proved ineffectual, proceeded to severer methods of penance and excommunication. For they concluded with St Paul, that without church

unity there was no inheriting the Kingdom of God. For the better preservation of which unity they had their *Συγαθικαί*, or commendatory epistles mentioned by St Paul, which were letters granted by the bishop to such of his clergy as were going into another diocese, to testify the soundness of their faith, and the integrity of their lives; and to such likewise, as had been under excommunication, or at least suspected so to have been, to declare their absolution, and recommend them to be again received into the number of the faithful. But now this union and correspondence between churches is in a manner quite laid aside; every one forms its own way of worship and polity, without consulting another: nay, one episcopal church can look upon the ruin of another, without interposing a prayer for its recovery, as is done for the welfare of other reformed churches, and as is prescribed by the 55th canon. But from the beginning it was not so; for no sooner was Acrius sowing his tares, and anti-episcopal principles, but immediately the Phineases stood up and condemned the heretic, and so the plague was stayed from the Church of Christ. We can no longer say that Jerusalem is at unity in itself, and that the Church is but one, for it is rent into factions and parties; and Christians divide now-a-days not only upon just grounds, but we have a church within a church, and strife, and hatred, and nicknames of distinction, between those of the same communion: and we have different sects and communions where we are united in one common faith and interest. These things, my brethren, ought not so to be. But it is not likely to be otherwise, while there is not primitive honesty and greatness of soul enough to lay before the people plainly the great sin of separation, about matters indifferent in their own nature. For if schism be a sin, and a damnable one too, as the apostle affirms, then it can never be too often inculcated: that though the civil power may excuse from the penalty, it can never take off from the guilt. But while we go on at this rate with our mollifying ointments, and are for sewing pillows only, and providing for the repose of sinners; while we are continually haranguing upon a false moderation, and can reject a schismatic with one hand, and give him the communion with the other, what do we else but teach the people to err upon principle, and to look upon church communion as nowise necessary to salvation? Some-

thing, it is true, must be allowed to the iniquity of the times ; but sure I am, that so many smooth things upon this head would never have been prophesied under the primitive warmth of Christianity. If then, the want of union and order is the bane of all society, either spiritual or civil ; if the people by knowing nothing of antiquity, judge only of the primitive Church by the doctrines and customs they hear and see in the places where they live, and consequently conclude that the Christians of old were as moderate and indifferent about unity and order in religion as the moderns ; and if this be a very dangerous and fatal mistake, then certainly it is a duty incumbent on every pastor to undeceive his flock, and both in season and out of season, to set them right in the notion of church-communion, and the sin of separation. And the way to do this, is first by the tenor of the gospel, and then by the practice of the purest ages ; it being, I think, sufficiently evident from what has been said, that what was the constant opinion and practice of the times nearest the apostles, and is moreover suitable to the precepts and spirit of the gospel, ought to be had in very high esteem by all Christians. This I take to be the only way of reforming upon a sure and lasting bottom, and to draw nearest to perfection, by reducing things (as far as may be) into their natural and primitive channel.

I come now in the last place to the point of discipline. The noise of the seas, and the madness of the people go together in Scripture and experience, and we may as well preach stillness to the one without a sea-wall, as obedience to the other without discipline. Whoever reads over but the tenth book of Sleidan's commentaries, will see such a scene of consecrated cruelty, beastliness, and blasphemy, as will make the hair of his flesh (in Job's phrase) stand up, and put him hard to it from an imagination of hell broke loose upon earth, to form an idea of wickedness equal to what he will there find in fact from the Anabaptists at Munster. And when the ancient fences of the church are broken down, and the reins of discipline let loose upon the necks of the people, and enthusiasm the spur, they seldom stop short of the same pitch of religious frenzy. We have felt something like it at home, and what has been, may be. For not only the power of the keys, but the very name of Church in the sense of the ancients, is now a perfect jest in the sense of some moderns. Christian liberty is looked upon,

not merely as a gracious delivery from ourselves, from the guilt and powers of sin, and Satan, and from the yoke of Moses, but as a total exemption from the fundamental laws of society and order; that is, the gospel dispensation is such a perfect law (if I may so term it) of libertinism or levelling, that the congregation are holy every one of them; not every man only, but every woman, though expressly forbidden by St Paul so much as to speak in the church, has now it seems the same authority to admit into it by baptism, as a priest. So that in short, the powers that are, both sacerdotal and civil, according to the new way of gospelising, are not from God but the people; and consequently all power being inherent in them, they can determine the form and execution of it as they will, and officiate (if they please) in any part of the priestly function; though it may not seem so august and agreeable to Sovereign Majesty to do every thing by itself, for the people to be masters and ministers both, and to serve at the altar in person, when they ordain the clergy to do it for them. But while the people are poisoned with such schemes of licentiousness, and permitted to sleep under the pleasing delusion, and to look upon the primitive discipline of the church as an arbitrary thing of mere human institution only, and consequently alterable at pleasure; this error, I say, if suffered to go on at this rate, is not unlikely to end, not only in the ruin of the church as a society, but in the utter dissolution of Christian morality. And therefore I shall take upon me to prove, that the primitive discipline, as to its essentials, is a necessary and inviolable order of God; and this I shall show, from the nature of the thing, from the express Word of God, and from the consequent practice of the universal Church; and if these three will not amount to a demonstration of a Divine establishment, I shall despair of ever knowing what will.

And first, from the nature of the thing. The God of order never appoints any government, but therewithal appoints the means necessary to that end. And if he secured the polity of the Jewish Church, which was to be dissolved in the fullness of time, with such a hedge of ceremony and discipline; it is not reasonable to believe, that He left the most perfect and lasting Church of Christ without any particular rules of government; especially since Christ has manifestly fixed the orders of church governors upon the Jewish model; and in the

case of private differences (as shall be more fully evinced anon from Matt. xviii. 15, 16, 17), proceeded upon the order in practice amongst the Jews. Had the primitive pastors admitted men into the Church without distinction, and retained them as members in spite of their sins, the Christian society had been justly charged by the heathen, as a college of debauchery; but by admitting so cautiously, and upon such a solemn vow of holiness in the presence of the congregation; and so likewise by publicly censuring, suspending, and excommunicating the incorrigible upon the non-performance of the baptismal covenant; by such acts of discipline, I say, the Church gave a public proof, and the most authentic testimony to those without, of the purity and holiness of the Christian profession.

The usefulness therefore and necessity of such discipline for the reputation and order of the Church, proves it to be from God, as well as the doctrine itself. But secondly, if notorious sinners may be suffered to live in the communion of the Church, and to enjoy the same privileges with the faithful; is not such a toleration a temptation to sin on, and to believe, by seeing no difference made here between the good and bad, that there will be none hereafter; but by being members of the same fraternity, they have the same title to happiness, notwithstanding their sins; that they shall all go to heaven in a body, and be saved, not so much for the goodness of their lives, as their adherence to a party? But now by seeing themselves cut off from the Christian body, their party-hopes will be cut off too; and by finding no communion to be had with an orthodox Church, without an orthodox life, and no salvation in opposition to such communion, they will see the misery of their condition; and this will be apt to bring them to a right notion of things, to a better mind, and better manners. Thirdly, by cutting off the incurable, the sound are preserved. The minds of men are as apt to infection as their bodies; and we are not fond of living where the plague is, purely to try the strength of our constitution. But if Atheists and Deists, Socinians and Antinomians, may lie undistinguished, uncensured in the bosom of the Church, who can tell where the plague will stop, and that the contagion may not spread by degrees throughout the community? Besides, the shame and fear of discipline are mighty checks upon the inclinations of

the less virtuous; and the good likewise are confirmed and strengthened by seeing justice done upon the wicked; and the honour of the Church is vindicated from scandal; and therefore from the nature of discipline I argue it to be of Divine authority, because the Church of God as a society cannot subsist without it.

To this argument from the nature of the thing, I add, in the next place, the express Word of God. Our Lord Himself in the case¹ of private trespasses, commands the injured person to go first and tell the trespasser his fault friendly by himself, and if that will not gain him, to take with him one or two more, and if he shall neglect to hear them, to tell it unto the Church, and if that proves ineffectual, he is to be looked upon as an heathen man and a publican. And that the governors of the Christian Church should not question the power of excommunicating upon such occasions, which was in practice among the Jews, our Lord thus solemnly determines the point, "Verily I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven." This then evidently declares an authority in the Church to interpose in the case of private differences, and to excommunicate too upon neglect of her authority; and if so, the argument holds much stronger, in the case of such public offences, as reflect upon the whole community, and strike not only at the honour, but the very being of the Church. St Paul severely reprimands the Corinthians² for not having taken the incestuous person from among them; which supposes a power in the Church of expelling that filthy person, by charging it as a crime that they had not done it, and for a precedent for the future excommunicates him himself. The same apostle³ elsewhere delivers himself in this authoritative form, "We command you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he hath received of us." And to put the matter out of question, the main design and drift of St Paul's First Epistle to Timothy, is to mind him of his authority, and to furnish him with rules about the government and discipline of the Church. To this purpose he lays before him the particular qualifications of church officers, and measures the pastor

¹ Matt. xviii. 15, 16, 17, 18.

² 1 Corinth. v.

³ 2 Thessal. iii. 6.

should take about information ; how they should proceed as to censures, and the other principal parts of ecclesiastical polity ; and then adds, " These things command and teach, let no man despise thy youth." And having delivered himself to the like effect in his epistle to Titus, he concludes with the like charge, " These things speak and exhort, and rebuke with all authority ; let no man despise thee." From these and many other passages to the same purpose I conclude, that either nothing in the Gospel is intelligible, or else that the Scriptures just now cited, evidently contain these following orders, viz., that impenitent sinners of any kind, are not to be continued in Church communion, but to be proceeded against by admonition, censure, suspension, and if these will not bring them to confession and amendment, they are to be rebuked with all authority, and cut off from the corporation of Christians. Secondly, that private Christians are commanded by St Paul in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to withdraw from such offenders, and with such persons no not to eat ; that is, as Tertullian and Theodoret understand the passage, with such we are not to eat at our own, much less at our Lord's table. And thirdly, that Timothy and Titus, the bishops and pastors of the Church, are the only persons with whom the exercise of this spiritual power is entrusted. If these rules of discipline are not clear from Scripture, we may raise a cloud about anything.

But granting the Gospel not so clear and full, as at first view it seems to be, for the manner of discipline, and the officers to be entrusted with it ; yet if with these seemingly plain texts we will compare the universal practice of the primitive Church (which certainly is the best commentary) we must have a mighty mind to be blind, if we cannot see the meaning. For nothing in history is more notorious, than that the successors of the apostles were very strict in the trial and examination of the candidates for Christianity, and that they put offenders under a long and severe course of penance, proportionate to their crimes, and did not restore the excommunicate till they had given good proof of their sincerity and repentance, and made full satisfaction to the Church ; and that nothing of this nature was transacted without the bishop's order. I am not ignorant, that the primitive Church varied as to some circumstances, and used their discretion as to

length of time, or degrees of penance, &c., but as to the substance of discipline in the particulars now mentioned, there was as universal agreement, as about the Sacraments themselves. If then the Gospel itself seems so express and clear for such a kind of church governors and for such a form of discipline, and if the practice of the first Christians exactly suits with this scheme, then we can have no greater demonstration in the question before us; for the primitive bishops were extremely fearful of innovating in any point, and many of them had their rules, not only from the letter of the Gospel, but from the very mouths of the apostles.

Thus then stood the government and discipline of the Church in the time of these Apologists; thus it maintained its authority and holiness in the hardest and most persecuting seasons, and increased and multiplied till it became the glory of the whole earth; but when the tempest was over, and the Church on the sunny side; when great men were to be humoured, and the Naamans would be cured in state, and be Christians upon their own terms, then came up the moderating methods, and abatements of the primitive rigour; then began the market of profitable inventions, of indulgences, auricular confessions, private penances, satisfactions, and the whole trade of commutation; all manifest traces and abuses of the old substantial discipline, for the more ease and convenience of flesh and blood. But when these and many other abominable corruptions were grown too common and too big to go down with a knowing age, then the world fell to work upon reformation, but upon different views, different principles. The great men of little religion were for reforming the Church out of its revenues, and stripping the clergy into bare preachers, with little subsistence and less authority; for fear of a relapse under the temptations of plenty and power. Others again turned at the very mention of bishop, and wrote against all sorts of order and church discipline with as much fury, as if whatever was practised in the Church of Rome, was anti-Christian. In short, all were wonderful harmonious in pulling down, and removing the rubbish, but not so unanimous in setting up what was primitive and apostolical in its stead; no, not Calvin, nor Bucer themselves, who complain so loudly and pathetically of the want of discipline. I am far from arguing now for a rigid conformity to the ancients in every point of

discipline, but as to the main or essence of it, I think it as plainly and expressly founded in Scripture, as baptism and the supper of the Lord; and that notorious drunkards, swearers, adulterers, murderers, and such like, should communicate in all the privileges of the Church and that the faithful should familiarly converse with such infectious persons; or that excommunicates should be restored to the peace of the Church, without any proofs of their amendment; this I take to be as clearly against the letter of the gospel, as idolatry against the second commandment.

It is objected indeed that though order and discipline are necessary, and commanded in the gospel, yet as to this or that particular way or form of discipline, churches are at liberty. But to this I answer; had the gospel commanded discipline in general only, without question churches then had been at liberty to have regulated themselves as they judged most proper to their present circumstances; but where the apostles have interposed, and prescribed particular rules of discipline, and commanded the observation of them over and over again in the name of Jesus Christ, without the least intimation of dispensation or change; and which rules, moreover were strictly and universally observed by the primitive Church for some centuries; there, I say, it is not sufficient to have discipline of another sort, but we must have the discipline prescribed by the apostles. For instance, it is an apostolical order, and pressed in the name of Jesus Christ, to withdraw ourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly; to note that man, and have no company with him that he may be ashamed. I ask, then, whether this rule is not neglected now in this particular, and whether the neglect of it is justifiable, and such a disorderly walker to be conversed with, and cherished in the bosom of the faithful? It is an apostolical order, and constantly observed of old, that scandalous livers should be debarred the holy mysteries. Is this rule dispensable at pleasure, or practicable at present? It is an apostolical order, that impenitent sinners should not only be debarred some privileges, but quite cut off from the Christian community, and not re-admitted till satisfaction made to the Church, and good proof of their repentance. Is this an order *pro hinc* and *nunc* only; or are excommunication and satisfaction to the Church, things to be

mentioned now with safety? Or indeed have we any office for the readmission of excommunicates, which seems to be a desideratum in our excellent Liturgy, and occasioned purely by the want of discipline? And lastly, the administration of church order and discipline was committed by the apostles to the bishops as their successors, and by them to the inferior clergy; they were the persons originally entrusted with the sole power of judging in cases purely spiritual, of inflicting penances, suspensions, excommunications, and providing for order and decency in the Church of Christ: and thus was the ecclesiastical power exercised constantly in the first and purest ages of Christianity. What the present practice is, need not be told; and by what authority, either from Scripture or antiquity, such ecclesiastical polities are erected, where pastors and people act jointly, or where churchmen have sometimes the least share in the spiritual jurisdiction, is what I am at a loss to know. For where the manner of government, and some particulars in discipline are positively fixed by the apostles, there we are not at liberty to alter.

It has been likewise urged with confidence enough, that by the magistrate's turning Christian, the necessity of church discipline is superseded, and the administration of it much safer in the hands of the laity than the clergy, and that two independent powers in the same state are contradictory, and destructive of each other.

I readily grant that a Christian magistrate, who beareth not the sword in vain, but with a knowing zeal draweth it against evil-doers, in the defence of those that do well, is highly instrumental to the glory of God, the credit of Christianity, and the good of his country; I acknowledge freely also, that the spirit of reformation now moving upon the hearts of many excellent lay-Christians, and quickening them to the execution of the laws of the land, and the proclamations of her Majesty against immorality and profaneness, is a mighty check upon disorderly walkers, and has given a new life and resurrection to piety and good manners, and in some measure made amends for the lamentable relaxation and decay of discipline; but then I must as freely own likewise, that the laws of the State are not the discipline of the Church; the things of Cæsar, and the things of God, are not under the same predicament, but of a quite different nature; each have their proper

boundaries and restrictions. The powers of Church and State are not, cannot be, two sovereign independent powers, with respect to the same things, for this indeed would introduce perpetual clashing and confusion; but the Church has nothing to do to interfere or meddle in affairs of State, it touches neither life, nor limb, nor civil property, nor disables anyone from being a member of the Commonwealth; and therefore in its own nature is not prejudicial to the authority of the civil power. For all Christians by their own law are expressly forbid to resist the civil magistrate under pain of damnation; and in the full height and rigour of discipline, when Church and State were at the utmost variance, we find our apologists thus acquitting themselves to the Senate upon this article. Did you ever hear of any such thing as a rebel Christian? Had ever Cæsar his taxes paid more conscientiously, or was more faithfully served in peace or war than by Christians? Had ever husbands better wives, parents better children, masters better servants, than those who came over to the faith? So that we find, that the primitive power of the Church in regulating her own members in matters purely spiritual, independently on the State, was so far in fact at its first institution from entrenching upon the civil authority, that it advanced obedience to princes, and every relative duty to the highest perfection, and secured them upon the surest foundation. As to the objection against church discipline in the hands of the clergy, (for the clergy now-a-days are to be loaded with everything) drawn from the accidental abuse of it, it is mere cant and paralogism: for would we deal fairly, we must argue from the natural tendency of such a discipline in such hands, and not from the accidental abuses of it. The original institution of church power is certainly in its own nature productive of great temporal blessings to any kingdom; are the clergy then of a quite different constitution from other people? Are men intoxicated by ordination, and enter into covenant with mischief, and commence tyrants by turning ministers of Christ? If not, where is the force of this argument against discipline, from the abuses of it in the hands of the clergy? What things, I pray, are not subject to abuses? The worship of God, the sacraments, the Scriptures, have been all abused; not one office from the sceptre to the constable's staff, but some time or other has

been abused ; and are all these then to be laid aside for fear of corruption ? If not, why is the government of the Church to be wrested out of the episcopal hands for this reason ?

But this is not all, for the question turns not so much upon the nature of the discipline, as the authority of its founder : for if Christ has set up a kingdom of His own, perfectly distinct from that of Cæsar, and set apart His own ministers, and lodged the government in their hands alone, with particular express rules about order and discipline, and promised to be with them to the end of the world ; and if men will call this government tyrannical, it reflects directly upon the Founder ; however it is a tyranny of Divine institution, and must be obeyed, be the consequences of obedience what they will. And if such a form of church government, and the particulars of discipline already mentioned, are not evident from Scripture and church history, it is in vain to argue anything from either ; if they are evident, then, though circumstances may be varied, yet as to substance, they are both invariable, because of Divine appointment ; unless the word of God can as evidently be produced for the investing the civil magistrate with an entire authority in spiritual matters upon his embracing Christianity ; this then is the point to be proved.

After all, what is this tyranny, or abuse of church power, which is charged upon our Church ? Why nothing but a primitive right of proceeding against notorious sinners, either by censure, suspension, or excommunication, according to the nature of the crime, and the degrees of obstinacy ; and upon hearty repentance, to receive them again. And is this any more tyranny, than what the meanest society pretends to over its members, as well as the Church ? Without which, there will not in time be so much as the face of religion, or the very virtue of hypocrisy left amongst us. Now that which I would leave upon the mind of my readers from hence, is this ; First, that we search the Scriptures, and the primitive Fathers to know what particulars in discipline are appointed by God, and do what we can to have them restored to life again. Secondly, that we consider seriously what the reformation of manners, and the reputation of Christ's Church require farther in point of discipline, and herein copy after the ancients in what is most edifying. And thirdly, that

we take all the care imaginable not to exceed the bounds of our commission, and intrench upon the civil prerogative, but pursue our orders as delivered in Scripture, and understood and practised by the first and most faithful ministers of Christ; then shall we proceed upon the most warrantable grounds, and be sure to render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and unto God the things that are God's.

I have now done with the three things proposed; viz. concerning the use and authority of the Fathers; concerning the objections against them, and the ill consequence of too lightly departing from them.

And if I have proved the ancients, incomparably the best interpreters of the divinely-inspired writings; if I have done justice to their injured memories, or in some measure wiped off the dirt and calumny of ill-given critics; if I have exposed the tragical effects of indulging our private fancies in religion, and of surrendering up ourselves entirely to the conduct of clear ideas in matters of faith, without vouchsafing to consult those who were instructed by the apostles; if I have gone out of the way awhile, the deeper to imprint the indispensableness of the primitive discipline in some particulars; and if these are but too reasonable subjects in this age of licentiousness, where men will be Christians without baptism, and priests of their own ordination, and eat and drink at their own tables in remembrance of Christ, in the nature of a grace-cup merely; then I hope digressions of this kind may be tolerable in such a crisis; and that I shall not be condemned at least by the lovers of Christian antiquity, for being so long in the vindication of the best men next the apostles, and the best books next the Bible. I was willing likewise to say what I could, to infuse an ambitious warmth in the younger clergy of entering upon the study of divinity, with the Scriptures in conjunction with the Fathers, and to form their notions, and fashion their minds by the doctrine and example of Christ and His apostles, and the noble army of martyrs; and not to take up, and quench their thirst with the corrupted streams of modern systems; and the public, I am sure, has nothing to fear from a clergy so initiated. For they will instruct their people in primitive holiness, and primitive obedience; they will have a just and knowing zeal for the unalienable rights of the Christian Church,

and a judicious charity and tenderness for their dissenting brethren ; they will never preach up the Church into secular dominion, nor preach it down to a kirk for the sake of unity ; they will do what is possible, according to the apostle's rule, to live peaceable with all men ; they will part with their coat and cloak also towards an accommodation, but they cannot be so comprehensive as to part with their head ; they cannot in duty to Christ and His apostles, or in respect to their successors till of yesterday, comply with an ordination without a bishop. They are ready to pay all deference to the moderns in points of the philosophy, but can see no reason to depart from the ancients in such matters of divinity, as they universally agree upon. And therefore I shall speak yet but once more in the behalf of the Fathers, and that too in the words of Job,¹ "Inquire, I pray thee, of the former age, and prepare thyself to the search of their fathers. For we are but of yesterday, and know nothing. Shall not they teach thee, and tell thee, and utter words out of their heart."

¹ Job viii. 8, 9, 10.

