

MARYLAND GAZETTE.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 14, 1784.

ber 10, 1784. ... N. C. JONES.

gust 20, 1784. ... NN, jun, clk.

gust 23, 1784. ... N MACKALL.

... HAMMOND.

... LARK, ... ATIONER, ...

... Charles-Street.

A LETTER to the ROMAN CATHOLICS of the City of WORCESTER, &c. Continued.

COULD easily prosecute this argument through a variety of instances; I could show you, that some of your most celebrated divines have acknowledged, that neither the supremacy of the Roman church, nor the invocation of saints, nor the worship of images, nor the precise number of seven sacraments, with several other important articles of your communion, can be proved from the scriptures. Was it therefore unreasonable to assert, that I could never discover them there, since they escaped the notice of such acute and interested enquirers.

It becomes, then, necessary to acknowledge, that these discriminating doctrines derive their whole claim to your assent, from the infallible authority of the church you belong to. Or, in the words of your catechism, "You must believe these things, because God has revealed them to his infallible church." But where is this revelation to be met with? Not in the scriptures, as you have already seen. God, therefore, has revealed these points by unwritten traditions. But how can I know, that such traditions are from God? If you answer me, that the infallible authority of the church has pronounced them to be so; then the whole matter rests ultimately upon this infallible authority. This being once admitted, all controversy must cease: but if it be rejected, then must the only rule of our faith be looked for in the bible.

I am not ashamed to confess, that it was this claim to infallibility, which prevented me to long from examining the tenets of the Roman church. Sheltered under the garb of so gorgeous a prerogative, impressed upon the yielding mind of youth by men of sense and virtue; backed, moreover, by the splendour of supposed miracles, and the horrors of anathemas, opinions the most absurd and contradictory must frequently dazzle and overawe the understanding. Amidst the fascinating glare of so mighty a privilege the eye of reason becomes dim and inactive—nothing can dispel the darkening film, but the more steady and powerful irradiations of truth; these, however, are so often blunted by the mists of ignorance, the enchantment of prejudice, by intolerance, or the fear of disturbing ancient notions, that they only find their way into the minds of a few, who are bold enough to embrace the hardhood of wisdom, and disregard all authority that clashes with reason.

Should it be said, that reason tells me to submit to an infallible church—my answer is, that reason tells me also, that such submission is weakness, unless this infallibility be demonstrated. Show me the proofs of this pretension, and if I do not admit them with every faculty of my soul, you have my leave to brand me with the pride of Lucifer. Should you urge, that reason must tell every unprejudiced man, that some texts in holy writ go to prove the infallibility of the Roman catholic church, may I not answer with confidence, that reason and experience tell me much more forcibly, that several articles are incredible and groundless, which rest solely on that infallibility? Does not reason, for instance, assure me with greater evidence, that the Almighty requires not our belief of a doctrine, which stands in direct contradiction to the only means he has allowed us of arriving at truth—I mean our senses and our understanding? Do a few controverted texts of the scripture make infallibility as evident to reason, as it is plain to the most ordinary capacity, that two bodies cannot be in the same place at once; that the same body cannot be in a million of different places at the same time; that whiteness cannot exist without a body, that is white; nor weight without a body, that is heavy; nor liquification without a body that is liquid; that the eternal God is not to be shut up in boxes, nor devoured corporally by vermin? (b) Does not reason assure me with greater evidence, that no creature is to be invocated, and honoured with religious worship; that

public service ought not to be performed in an unknown language; that the beloved servants and friends of God will not be punished after death in the flames of purgatory; that there is no common store-house, in which are laid up the superfluous merits of the saints, to be drawn from thence by the pope, and applied, as he thinks proper, to the benefit of the living and the dead?—Such to me is the language of reason, which was never yet rejected with impunity—She will be heard—the mult be respected—her claim to our reverence and attention arises from the superiority of her counsels to those of fellow mortals.—Every human being must listen to her voice, or cease to be rational. Created for us, and acting within us, she speaks to us after the manner best suited to our several characters, abilities and duties—Becoming all to all, she addresses herself with gentleness to some, and with energy to others; but when passions are silent, and prejudice suspended, her language must ever be the language of truth. Religion and reason can never be at variance, because the most rational religion must always be the best. You remain Roman catholics, because you think your reason tells you, that yours alone is the true church of Christ. You think it reasonable to believe, that at these words, "This is my body," pronounced by a priest, a bit of bread is changed into the true natural body of Jesus Christ, and is to be adored as the eternal God, because your reason convinces you that Christ spoke these words in a literal sense, and because your church understands them in this manner. But when reason assures me, that innumerable arguments evince their meaning to be figurative, am I not bound to open my mind to the light of conviction, and discard the infallibility, which enforces the absurdities of the opposite opinion?

If from reason you appeal to revelation, the plea of infallibility will be found equally unsupported. You will tell me, doubters, that the ancient fathers unanimously interpret some scriptural passages in this sense; but, I apprehend, that upon enquiry, such an assertion would appear very hazardous indeed. Let an impartial man read the fathers upon these, and some other subjects, and I will defy him to declare, that he has met with this boasted uniformity among them. But the catholic church has decreed such to be the meaning of the fathers, and every christian is bound to acquiesce in her decisions. So that in fact, the whole argument comes to this. The church is infallible, because her infallibility is gathered from scripture by the unanimous consent of the fathers; and this unanimous consent of the fathers is asserted, and established, by the very infallible authority, which in the first instance it was alleged to demonstrate. Or in other words, the church of Rome is infallible, because she herself has so determined. Here is a circle of false reasoning, out of which no advocate for infallibility can ever extricate himself to my satisfaction. It is an old, and hackneyed argument, but not less conclusive on that account.

As to the few scriptural texts, which seem to countenance infallibility, they appear no longer conclusive, than I refused to examine them. The divine author of the christian religion promised, it is true, to teach his disciples all truth; (John 14, 15, 16,) and he undoubtedly did so. But where did he so far insure the faith of their successors, whether presbyters, bishops, or popes, as to secure them from building wood, hay and stubble upon the foundations of the gospel? Does not St. Paul pronounce that such would actually be the case? (1 Cor. 3, 12.) He promised to be with his disciples to the end

(c) It is very remarkable, that all Roman catholics are bound to admit an infallible authority, yet few of them agree where, or in whom it resides. Some say almost all the old schoolmen have taught the infallibility of the pope. But some popes, viz. Liberius Honorius, John 22, &c. having unfortunately subscribed heretical opinions, this doctrine is at present almost out of date. Some place infallibility in a general council. Others in the pope and the council received by the whole church. But when all is said, that possibly can be said, the pope must be acknowledged by consistent Roman catholics as the sole depositary of infallibility. For since the council of Trent, it is unanimously taught in all Roman catholic churches, that a council can decree nothing without the assent of the pope; that he alone has a right to interpret the words of faith, which he determines to be so. Thus it is evident, that infallibility rests ultimately with the pope. The council declares the meaning of some passage in scripture, or of some point of tradition, and then the pope pronounces in his own name upon the sense of this declaration. This ultimate decision of the pope is supposed to be inspired by the spirit of God. But is the christian, who has no means of coming to the knowledge of this decision but by reading it, or hearing it read, equally secured from error by the spirit of God? If he be, then no private Roman catholic can ever misapprehend the meaning of any tenet; and of consequence, he is as infallible as the pope himself with regard to the right apprehension of any religious truth. If he be not secured from error, then he may as well build his faith upon the words of scripture, which he is certain was written by divine inspiration. A christian the more, may mistake the words of a pope, when he hears, or reads them, as easily as he can mistake the words of scripture. Why, therefore, not content himself with what all parties agree to be the word of God; in humble confidence, that if he read, or hear it with due attention, diligence and sincerity, he will be as effectually secured from any dangerous error, as if he had read, or heard the formula of faith published by Pope Pius IV.

of the world (Matth. 19, 20.) And who denies it? He is with his church by his protection, by his grace, by the lights he communicates to her by the strength, which he exerts in supporting her against violence and temptation. But cannot he be with his church without rendering her infallible? Is he not with every just man? Yet who would hence infer, that such a man is secured from every error, beyond a possibility of being at any time deceived? Besides why should the presence of Christ render the church infallible, rather than impeccable? Are not vice and error equally inherent in the corruption of man? Is not the former as formidably an enemy to religion, as the latter? Is not the christian system as perfectly calculated to make us good men, as orthodox believers? Would not the church be equally overturned, should either of these vices become universal? Why then was it not as necessary to secure her against the one as the other? But the fact is, neither partial vice nor partial error destroys the foundations of the christian religion, and therefore it was unnecessary to fence against either. "That the gates of hell, or rather of death," (as the word *hadai* manifestly imports) "shall never prevail against the christian church," Matth. 16, 18. is an article of my belief, as well as of yours. But the obvious meaning of Christ's promise is only this, "that neither the subtlety of infernal spirits, nor the passions of men, nor the violence of both, shall ever succeed in overturning his religion, to which he has been pleased to annex perpetuity. However feeble and disordered his church may be at times, the powers of death shall never overcome her. She shall then only cease to exist, when a time shall be no more." The text therefore does not even insinuate, that the christian church should never change articles, besides such as are fundamental and necessary, or that some overbearing society of christians should not hold out many erroneous opinions as terms of communion to the rest of the faithful. Against these great essential tenets, exalted in the apostles creed, and adopted through every age by the most numerous body of christians, the gates of death or hell, shall never prevail. The enemy may lowe us and tires among this heavenly grain; he may build structure of straw upon these unshaken foundations; the ignorance, and passions of mankind may exhale around them some noxious vapours of superstition, and immorality; but they will ever retain sufficient light to conduct each upright and pious believer to all points of his duty, upon which his salvation depends (d).

The narrow limits within which I mean to restrain this address, forbid me to dwell any longer on this fruitful argument. The little I have said could not, with any propriety be omitted. It is impossible to apologise for deterring old opinions without thereby mentioning the reasons, that prove them to be groundless. I shall only beg your attention to one more consideration of this plea to infallibility, and I have done.

(1) The works, which I have chiefly made use of on this, and other subjects, are, the religion of protestants a safe way to salvation, by William Chillingworth. An answer to a challenge made by a jesuit in the year, and a treatise de successione et statu christiano ecclesie, by archbishop Usher. Defense de la convention transaction du concile de Trent, par le Pere le Courayer. Heretous de sacramento eucharistie. Defense de la reformation, par Mons. J. Caulet. Bishop Hurd's Discourses on the prophecies. These I have read with all the attention I am capable of. And to these, especially to the first, which Sir Locke pronounces the masterpiece of logic, I refer every impartial christian, who desires to find the great utility of the gospel delivered in their genuine simplicity, supported by astonishing powers of reasoning, and effectually withdrawn from the clasp of modern corruptions.

[To be concluded in our next.]

LONDON, August 7.

THE cause of Sir John Burgeyne's arrival in India, is with great industry kept a profound secret from the public; but his friends do not scruple to assert, that when the circumstance attending this mysterious business becomes known, a scene of Asiatic tyranny will be brought to light of a very extraordinary nature.

By authentic letters from Smyrna, dated May 16, we are assured, that the plague has almost depopulated that city. Turks, Jews, Greeks, and Armenians, have perished without number. Of the Greeks alone, sometimes above 130 were buried in a day. In April last, when the captain pacha arrived, to take the taxes and tribute money, some hundreds of houses were found unoccupied, or without owners.

The balloon-hat, after having been superseded for a few days, by the adoption of the rural straw umbrella, has again been reinstated as the capital ornament of female untrets. This revolution has not been so much the result of caprice, as of necessity; the rage for the straw umbrellas having been so prevalent, that the price arose to a degree of enormity. The latitude of the year, from hip to hip, has considerably decreased in the course of last week, which has materially lessened the price of whalebone, and, of course, threatens prejudice to the Greenland fishery.—The heel, however, has received an elevation at last, and the tete begins to rise from its late flatness, into a most respectable altitude.

Stays having been found very inconvenient, on several occasions, are laid aside for the Martlettes or quilted bodices; and the ladies not being at present so ticklish as