

A Report of the
Discussion Between
Mr. Burnett and Mr. O'Leary
Relative to
"The Indiscriminate Circulation
of the Holy Scriptures"



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A REPORT

OF

THE DISCUSSION

WHICH TOOK PLACE AT THE ARGYLL ROOMS, LONDON, ON
THURSDAY, 24th MAY,

BETWEEN

THE REV. MR. BURNETT

AND

MR. O'LEARY,

(BOTH OF THE CITY OF CORK.)

RELATIVE TO

"THE INDISCRIMINATE CIRCULATION OF THE
HOLY SCRIPTURES."

DUBLIN :

WILLIAM CURRY, JUN. AND CO. SACKVILLE-STREET,
AND R. M. TIMS, GRAFTON-STREET.

1827.

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THE DISCUSSION

IN LONDON.

Subject:

THE INDISCRIMINATE CIRCULATION OF THE SCRIPTURES.

THE following DISCUSSION between the Rev. JOHN BURNETT and Mr. O'LEARY, both of the city of Cork, relative to "the Indiscriminate Circulation of the Holy Scriptures," took place at the Argyll Rooms, London, on Thursday, the 24th of May, and continued from Twelve until Four o'clock on that day. The attendance was very respectable both as to number and rank.

Major-General NEVILLE, having been appointed the Chairman, sat on the platform. Mr. O'Leary the Roman Catholic was on his right hand, and Mr. Burnett, a Dissenting Clergyman of Cork, was on his left.

A few minutes after twelve the Chairman rose and said, that the ladies and gentlemen present were aware of the subject of the discussion; that it related to the indiscriminate circulation of the Holy Scriptures, without the appendage of note or comment. To preserve order it was necessary to lay down two or three simple rules, about the propriety of which the disputants were agreed, and as to the regulation which it would belong to the Meeting to maintain, he had no doubt they would do so without further observation.

First, That no one should speak but the disputants.

Second, No marks of approval or otherwise should be expressed in any way by the assembly.

Third, That each of the controversialists should speak for half an hour, when he would be answered by his antagonist.

The subject was one of great importance, and he hoped it would be discussed with mutual love and forbearance, and promote the glory of God, and the good of mankind. The gallant General then called on Mr. Burnett to open the discussion, and observed that the parties were well acquainted with each other, and agreed as to the course of proceeding.

Mr. BURNETT then rose and spoke nearly as follows :—Before I commence this discussion, it may not be unnecessary that I should state the origin of it. At a Meeting of the Irish Evangelical Society, some statements made by one of the speakers were objected to by my friend, Mr. O'Leary, and he wished to reply; as that Meeting, however, was called for a specific purpose, they thought it best to carry on the discussion at some other time and place, and I offered to meet Mr. O'Leary, to discuss any question connected with the Roman Catholic system, to which meeting he agreed. I subsequently called upon him to make the necessary arrangements, and this is the result. I stand here as counsel for the defendant; my client is the Protestant religion, charged by the Roman Catholics with the very heinous offence of circulating without note or comment, and indiscriminately, the Holy Scriptures. It is not usual, I believe, for the defendant's counsel to speak first, but being requested to do so, I will proceed; first, however, remarking, that I have received no fee for my professional labours, and that I shall receive none after I have brought them to a close. The same remark will equally apply to my friend, so that none could suspect us of being influenced by fee or reward to advance this or that argument or assertion. My case is, that the Holy Scriptures were intended to be generally and indiscriminately cir-

culated, and that the design of their Author is fully met when they are distributed without note or comment. In maintaining this point, I have no wish to produce any excitement but that which will be the natural success or failure of my argument.

First then, I assert, that the origin of the Scriptures prove that they were intended for indiscriminate perusal. The first part of these books were written for the use of the Jews. If we examine what is written in their law, we shall see what use they were directed to make of them. I shall refer to the Roman Catholic Bible. ("And I," said Mr. O'Leary, "shall use the Protestant.") The first passage I cite will be found in the 6th chap. of Deuteronomy, verse 6—9 :

"And these words which I command thee this day, shall be in thy heart: And thou shalt tell them to thy children, and thou shalt meditate upon them sitting in thy house, and walking on thy journey, sleeping, and rising. And thou shalt bind them as a sign on thy hand, and they shall be and shall move between thy eyes. And thou shalt write them in the entry, and on the doors of thy house."

Surely this must mean the most common use that could be made of the law. Again in Deuteronomy, 11th chap. verse 18—20, there is further evidence of the most general use of the law.

"Lay up these my words in your hearts and minds, and hang them for a sign on your hands, and place them between your eyes. Teach your children that they meditate on them, when thou sittest in thy house, and when thou walkest on the way, and when thou liest down and risest up. Thou shalt write them upon the posts and the doors of thy house."

Next we come to the prophets; and if we examine the 16th chap. of Luke, verse 29—31, we find Abraham thus addressing Dives.

"And Abraham said to him, they have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them. But he said; no, father Abraham, but if one went to them from the dead, they will do penance. And he said to him: If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they believe if one rise again from the dead."

We here see how Abraham refers to the law and the prophets, as accessible to the people, and the one placed in *juxta position* with the other, equally claiming the

examination and regard of the Jews. No reference is made to any living tribunal, but merely to Moses and the prophets. In John, chap. 5, verse 45—46, our Saviour says,

“There is one that accuseth you, Moses, in whom you trust. For if you did believe Moses, you would perhaps believe me also, for he wrote of me.”

If the writings of Moses had not been fully and freely circulated, can we conclude that the Redeemer would have referred the Jews to the writings of Moses? Did he refer them to a book monopolized by the priesthood, and only very partially in the hands of the people? There are numerous passages of the same import, but these are sufficient to prove that the prophets were familiar to the people, and that they must therefore have been designed for general circulation. Next we come to the Gospel, which I assert was written for the instruction of all, and not a few. In John, chap. xx. verses 30—31, it is said,

“Many other signs also did Jesus in the sight of his disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in his name.”

The Scriptures are not said to be written for the purpose of being deposited with a privileged order of men, but, “these are written that you may believe.” How, if not by reading them and receiving the testimony which they give of Christ? Thus it is seen that the Gospel, the prophets, and the law, were designed for indiscriminate circulation. If we refer to the epistles, we shall find that fifteen of them were addressed to the people indiscriminately. There is not a qualifying phrase to be found in them, either as regards their objects, or the mode in which they are to be used. You can examine their introductions at your leisure. One of the epistles out of the sixteen, viz. that addressed to the Philippians, has a peculiarity about it; the clergy are particularly introduced in it, and if the privilege were to belong only to them, here was an opportunity of stating it. Paul and Timothy are here found addressing the epistle to all the saints at Philippi (the body of the people are mentioned first, and the clergy last), with the bishops and deacons.

Not a word is here stated about confining the privilege to the bishops and deacons; no such idea as qualifying or limiting the circulation of the Word of God, had been there introduced. The Book of the Apocalypse is the last, and surely when we reflect on the nature and contents of that book, if any one of them required more learning than all the rest to understand, and, therefore, might be less proper to be circulated amongst the multitude, this is the book; but so far from limitation, a blessing is actually pronounced on him who shall read it. We are told that this is a book of prophecy and of mystery, but even here we find,

“Blessed is he that readeth and heareth the word of this prophecy, and keepeth those things that are written in it.”

Every reader, as well as every hearer and doer, is pronounced blessed. But this is not all; in the absence of any limiting, qualifying, or exclusive clause, we have the blessed Redeemer himself, commanding the people to

“Search the Scriptures, for you think in them to have life everlasting; and the same are they which give testimony of me.” (See John, chap. v. ver. 39.)

And if he had intended so to do, here was a fine opportunity of expressing the qualification. So far from it, our Saviour addresses a people among whom the Scriptures were known to be circulated; he says, “Search the Scriptures, and by searching you will find that they testify of me.” They were urged to press their inquiries until they found the Messiah. Again, we find that the laity were not merely allowed to read the Scriptures, they were authorized to expound them.

“And he came to Nazareth where he was brought up: and he went into the synagogue according to his custom on the sabbath-day; and he rose up to read, and the book of Isaias the prophet was delivered unto him. And as he unfolded the book, he found the place where it was written: ‘the Spirit of the Lord is upon me, wherefore he hath anointed me, to preach the Gospel to the poor he hath sent me, to heal the contrite of heart. To preach deliverance to the captives, and sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of reward.’ And when he had folded the book, he restored it to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them:

This day is fulfilled this Scripture in your ears."—Luke, chap. 4. ver. 16—21. •

Here is the Redeemer himself, not in his character of Messiah, but the son of Joseph the carpenter; not a Levite, or of the order of the priesthood, but one of another tribe—the tribe of Judah. Here is this layman, an unknown and obscure individual, countenanced by the head of the assembly, taking the book, reading the passage, giving it back to the minister, and expounding its contents to the people. But then it is said you must not put it into the hands of children, they cannot understand it. How does this comport with the example of the first Christians? If you refer to Timothy, 2 epist. 3 chap. 14 verse, the apostle Paul thus addresses his beloved disciple and friend :

“ But continue thou in those things which thou hast learned, and which have been committed to thee; knowing of whom thou hast learned them: And because from thy infancy thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which can instruct thee to salvation, by the faith which is in Christ Jesus.”

Here is Timothy, who, from his childhood knew the Holy Scriptures, commended by an inspired apostle, who was giving directions to his disciple as to the affairs of the Church, for his acquaintance with that very book, which, if the Scriptures may not be circulated, the people cannot read. If the evidences I have thus brought forward do not satisfy the mind of a candid and liberal person, no proposition, as it appears to me, can. Let me ask what part of Scripture is there that forbids the indiscriminate circulation of the book? It is not pretended that there is a single passage prohibiting the people from reading it. I maintain then, that there is none that, by fair inference, brings the right of the people to possess it in question. Can it then be for a moment admitted, that any order of men have a right to monopolize to themselves the precious Word of God, or to prohibit the people from reading and judging of its contents for themselves? I am perfectly satisfied that these statements will bear the strictest scrutiny, and I am very glad that they will be put to that test.

Mr. O'LEARY.—Allow me to assure you, Mr. Chairman, that I did not accept the present challenge out of

any sense that I may entertain of my own argumentative powers, or from any desire to display my theological acquirements,—which, indeed, you will more readily believe, when I acknowledge that I am less acquainted with the Bible than with profane history ; but the question at issue between Mr. Burnett and myself appeared to me so clear and self-evident, that my only wonder was, how it could be made a subject for discussion. My learned antagonist has produced sundry quotations to support his side of the question, and doubtless I could produce counter ones, though that will be hardly necessary, for it really appears to me that his very quotations tell more for than against me. Mr. Burnett began by saying, that the origin of the Scriptures proved that they were intended for general circulation. Now, Sir, there is a vagueness about this expression which I confess I cannot understand, and as he has not even condescended to prove what that origin was, I certainly must contend that he has entirely failed in this, his first position. Mr. Burnett's next question is relative to the Scriptures being to be written on our door-posts ; but, whatever good authority there may be for the Bible, it still must be able to stand the test of common sense ; and is not common sense committed when it is supposed that the whole of the Holy Volume can be inscribed on the door-posts of a house ? The Scriptures were given to us for our general guidance through life, and therefore they are, no doubt, capable of being confined within the general rule of common sense. This is my undivided feeling on the subject, and I can never admit that the intricacy of prophecies can bear any private interpretation ; in which I do but hold the same opinion as St. Peter.

Next comes the story of Dives ; but to that I have to reply, that the words of Scripture expressly bid us attend to the instructions of the clergy, who sit in the chair of Moses, and whose words are, therefore, to be observed and obeyed. Mr. Burnett insists that the Scriptures were written for the instruction of all. So do I ; but, to reason by analogy, the laws of the land are enacted for all, but for all that it would produce a strange situation in human affairs were all to study the law. If that were to be the case, why had Blackstone written ? And so, if all were to be judges of the hidden meanings of Scripture, what use would there be for the wise Blackstones who

had expounded the laws of those Scriptures? But, if I must really answer the learned gentleman's quotation of Dives, by one of my own, I would refer him to the Hebrews, chap. xiii. ver. 17.—

“Obey them that have rule over you, and submit yourselves; for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief, for that is unprofitable for you.”

This, it is true, is but one text, while Mr. Burnett has affected to give many; but in my opinion, one quotation is as good as forty, to prove that we are bound to submit to those whom the law or the church has put over us. But with respect to the question of the Church authority, I shall not say a word; for I do not stand here at present as the advocate of Popery, but have only come before you to shew what danger may arise from the indiscriminate circulation of the Scriptures. And now, Sir, I may refer you to another text, to be found in the fifteenth chapter of the Acts, and from which we learn that on a dispute arising respecting circumcision, Paul and Barnabas were selected out from others, as fit to carry on the discussion, and to be of authority, and teach; which I conceive argues strongly against general circulation, and, what must always follow, private interpretation.

Mr. Burnett, in his quotation about Timothy, contends that as it is said he knew the Scriptures from his childhood upwards, that knowledge proceeded from his perusal of them; but I would rather argue that his intimate knowledge arose from having been taught them, rather than from having read them. It was impossible that any one could peruse the Scriptures without entertaining doubts upon certain points, and therefore it was an evident consequence of their being generally read, that heresy would creep in. That such doubts are certain to take place, may be gathered in a moment from a book which I hold in my hand, and which gives an account of 237 subdivisions of Christianity. Here is the Socinian, Sir, who argues against the Godhead of Christ—the Supra-Lapsarian, who contends that from the creation of man it has been settled who are to be lost, and who are to be saved—the Sub-Lapsarian, who is diametrically opposed to the Supra-Lapsarian,—the Berean (as we understood Mr. O'Leary,) who argues that we need only be

certainly persuaded of our own salvation to enjoy it—the Amsdorffian, who would supercede the necessity of all good works. But, Sir, I shall not go through with the list ; it is not to my purpose. All I would say, is, that if so many pious (for I dare not dispute their good intentions) and learned men have differed in giving an interpretation to the contents of the Holy Volume, what must not the consequence be, if the book is trusted to men with but a half, or a quarter of their talent ? What can possibly better prove the danger of circulation, than the different deductions at which the founders of these various sects have arrived ?

The Rev. Mr. BURNETT.—Sir, none of the points I stated have been at all affected by the arguments of my opponent, and only one or two have even been touched by him. I agree with him at once that one text is as good as forty, and when that one text can be brought home to support a position, we may presume that we have ascertained the mind of God upon the point at issue, and no cavil can shake the foundation of any proposition that can be built upon it. But I cannot admit that the one text cited by him has at all affected the question between us. He complains that I ought, *in limine*, to have proved the divine origin of the Scriptures. That question, however, does not arise out of the points in dispute, though I am ready to meet it immediately, if Mr. O'Leary chooses. My argument is, that the law written by Moses, which conveyed the will of God to his creatures, was meant to be freely circulated among them ; that the prophecies were written for the same purpose, and are associated with the law of Moses by the Redeemer himself in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus ; both the law and the prophets being thus held up to the people in juxta position, are proved to be intended for the same purpose, viz. the general instruction of the community—a purpose which could not be effected, were there any interdict or qualification connected with the circulation or reading of the Sacred Volume. Mr. O'Leary asserts, on the strength of a text of Scripture I quoted, that selections from the law were only intended to be disposed of as I described for the guidance of the people. Who told him that selections only were to be made ? for neither Moses nor the prophets refer to any such selections, Let him produce

his authority. The people had the entire law before them, and they might select what portions they thought fit either to attach to their garments, or affix to their door posts ; but I defy him to show from any passage of the Sacred Writings, that it was intended that selections merely should be given to the people for this purpose.— So much for his argument on selections. Mr. O'Leary farther asserts, that the indiscriminate use of the Sacred Volume is prohibited by the command of St. Paul to Timothy, to avoid " foolish questions about the law." I must here notice the difference between the plain words of the text, and the inference that has been drawn from them. The commandment it will be observed, is not addressed to the multitude, and therefore it has nothing to do with them, though Mr. O'Leary has applied it to them ; but it is addressed to Timothy, a minister, and is directed against " those vain janglings and strivings which had arisen among the men with whom Timothy dwelt."

He was to avoid their " foolish questions " then, and not to avoid the Scriptures, as Mr. O'Leary assumes. The reference to " foolish questions," therefore, applied not to the people only, but to every man, whether he belonged to the priests or the laity.—If any interdict was intended then, it must be extended to all, and then the Scriptures should be read by none.—This part of Mr. O'Leary's case, therefore, falls to the ground. The next passage cited by Mr. O'Leary, alluding to the obedience paid to those who sat in the chair of Moses, can be easily explained. The law given to the Jews was the law of the nation, and the persons referred to in that passage, were its administrators. In calling on the Jews, therefore, to be obedient to them, the Redeemer only commanded them to obey the law of the land ; but beyond that far, authority did not extend. To show that the commandment had no relation to the doctrine of salvation, we have only to notice, that when Christ introduced that subject, he cautioned them to

" Beware of the leaven of the Scribes and the Pharisees,"

by which, as it is afterwards explained, he meant the doctrine of the Scribes and Pharisees. The two texts are harmonised by this plain solution,—in the one case the

Jews are called upon as a people to obey the laws by which they were governed, and in the other, they are warned against being misled by those who made the Word of God void by their traditions. This text, therefore, does not support Mr. O'Leary's case. Mr. O'Leary asks, why I am a teacher of the doctrines of religion, when the people can read the Scriptures themselves? The question has often been put to me, and my answer has always been that a religious teacher does not monopolize the Bible, and teach whatever he may think proper; he merely assists his congregation to acquire a knowledge of the will of God, as it is revealed in the Scriptures; and he does so, because he has devoted his time to the study of the Sacred Volume. Still, however, he holds up the divine record as the basis of his teaching, and as the source from which his instructions are derived; and he tells his hearers, that if what he has delivered to them be not found in that record, they ought, as they value their immortality, to regard his instructions as an idle tale, and a "cunningly-devised fable."

He merely acts as a spur to quicken their diligence, and offer his aid for the guidance of their inquiries; but he does not set himself up as a barrier to repel their advances, and monopolize the standard by which they might try his ministrations. I can therefore easily conceive that a man may become a religious teacher, and yet maintain the importance of an indiscriminate circulation of the Scriptures.

A text from the Hebrews has been brought forward to prove that we ought to obey those who have 'the rule over us.' On Mr. O'Leary's principles, this text tells against himself. We are distinctly told that the prelates of the Roman Catholic Church lay claim to unqualified obedience belonging only to the church itself. By obeying the prelates then, we may act in opposition to the decrees of the Church; for as the prelates are not infallible, they may mislead us, and the apostle could not urge obedience of an unqualified character to those who are liable to mislead, unless he were to point to a standard by which the reasonableness of the demand made on our obedience might be tried. But a distinction is here made by the Roman Catholic Church. Every man, she says, has a right to judge for himself in things that are not matters

of faith. The obedience here spoken of, therefore, is a qualified obedience, even on the shewing of the Church of Rome itself, and not that which Mr. O'Leary describes. The passage viewed aright will be found to allude only to the obedience which the Scriptures warrant the minister to require; and to discover the extent of that obedience the people must read the Scriptures, and judge of the amount of demand made by their pastors, and obey or disobey accordingly. Mr. O'Leary adds, that the obedience of the Catholics is due to the prelates only when they teach the faith which the Church has approved of—but the apostles expressly tell us, that they do not claim dominion over the faith of their followers, whereas the obedience demanded by the prelates of the Romish Church invests them with a power and a prerogative in matters of faith which the apostles themselves did not claim, though they were individually and infallibly inspired to dictate the faith of the Church, a qualification to which the prelates have not ventured to lay claim. Paul, one of the greatest ministers who ever adorned the Church, calls on the people to judge for themselves. "I speak," says he, "as unto wise men, judge ye what I say:" (1 Cor. x. 15.) My friend has referred to the Acts of the Apostles, xv. 29, for the purpose of shewing that the record of the proceedings of the Council at Jerusalem held up a type of the council, which prevailed in the Roman Catholic Church. On referring, however, to the passage, it will be found that no analogy can be drawn between the power claimed by the Council at Jerusalem, and the power claimed by the Roman Catholic Church. The Church of Rome claims infallibility on matters of faith only, and rejects this claim on matters of discipline. Now the Council at Jerusalem was composed of men who were infallibly inspired to teach the Church generally; but in that instance they gave their decision on matters of discipline only, and not on matters of faith at all. Instead, therefore, of furnishing an analogy to the Councils of the Church of Rome, this Council presents a direct contrast. The allusion to it, therefore, was unfortunate on the part of my friend. The appointment on the part of the Council, of Paul and Barnabas as teachers of the people, you will perceive, from what I have said, does not militate against the circulation of the Scriptures. On the contrary, these teachers travelled to give wider circulation to

them, by referring the people to them in their ministrations. Mr. O'Leary, in referring to my remark on Timothy's early acquaintance with the Scriptures, begs me to allow that Timothy did not read them; but that he was "taught" them. Were we informed that a celebrated Barrister, who had shewn an early predeliction for the law, had since his youth, been acquainted with Blackstone's Commentaries, would any one suppose, as receiving such information, that the youth had never read Blackstone? No; we would take it for granted, that his early disposition towards legal studies had led him to an equally early perusal of Blackstone; and such was precisely Timothy's case with regard to the Scriptures. Mr. O'Leary's assumption is too absurd to be entertained for a moment. I have been told, that a vast number of sects has arisen from the indiscriminate use of the Scriptures; but I assert without hesitation, that they have arisen from their limited diffusion, and not from their extended circulation. If you suppose that men who take up different creeds from a partial acquaintance with the principles of religion, are to snatch from them the Book from which alone they can obtain a full knowledge of those principles, and give it into the hands of a few who are interested in its misrepresentations, how is it possible to harmonise the various views of sects, but by a free circulation of their common standard? The views adopted by the mind cannot, like the movements of the body, be the subject of legislative enactment. For though that might prevent the sectarians from an open expression of their principles, it could not prevent them from forming and entertaining them. The only remedy for this evil, then, is the indiscriminate diffusion of the Scripture, that the minds of the sectarians may be brought to bear on the points at issue, in connexion with a reference to their common standard, that the desired unanimity may be thus secured. I contend, then, that we may trace the origin and progress of sects and parties to the limited circulation which has hitherto attended the Scriptures—and thus I turn Mr. O'Leary's argument upon himself. His principles are responsible for the divisions that exist in the religious world; but, my principles, when fully acted on, would swallow up these divisions in general harmony. Mr. O'Leary would prohibit the use of the Scriptures except to those who had learning and discretion to make a proper use of them; in other words, he would give them

only to men of intellectual minds who were imbued with just principles, and withhold them from the duped and deluded multitude, who, from want of the light which they displayed, required their assistance the more : he would give light to those who were too enlightened to allow him to withhold it ; and he would keep the dark dupes of his assumed authority in their darkness. It is from the limited circulation of the Scriptures that the uninformed mind, having got a glimpse of the glorious truths they unfold, has misled itself and misled others ; and the only way to cure the mischief is to take up the floodgates, and let the waters of life flow, until every land has become the theatre of moral and religious fertility ; a consummation to which the truths of the Bible are destined to carry the population of our world.

Mr. O'LEARY.—Mr. Burnett, Sir, having now given you his opinion on the text which I have quoted, nothing, I think, can better prove the danger run in indiscriminate circulation, than the difference there is between us in the deductions we have made : but allow me here to observe, that my learned friend has assumed what I never laid down—that the laity have no right to read the Scriptures : this is not all my feeling on the subject : and what I said was, that they ought not be suffered to read them without having notes attached to the most dubious passages.—Mr. Burnett has told us, that Christ himself, when but a layman, went into the synagogue, and there expounded the Holy Truths : but it should be remembered, that about that time many were starting up as prophets, all of whom undertook the same task, and that Christ himself might be reckoned as one of the number. Mr. Burnett again has said, that I assume that Timothy had the Scriptures explained to him ; but, on the other hand, Mr. Burnett does not assume that he read them himself, and surely one assumption is as good as another. My learned antagonist has asked, cannot every body that chooses peruse Blackstone ? To which I answer, yes : but, at the same time, what young mind is suffered to bury itself in the intricacies of law, without having a more sober and steady judgment at hand to help him through his difficulties. Mr. Burnett, too, says that the orders with respect to the Pharisee only applied to temporal laws ; but the temporal laws are so mixed with the spiritual, that it is quite impossible to separate them : besides, the words

of the texts are, "for they watch for your souls;" which clearly applies to the divine law. My learned friend seems to want to throw upon me the onus of taking the law, as a Roman Catholic, from the bishop, who is set over me, even though he should be opposed to the Council; but though it is true that we are bound to take his doctrines, yet we are by no means responsible for it; for if it be discovered that the Bishop has overstepped the truth, he is liable to be displaced, and to have another set up in his place; and thus the truths of the Roman Catholic doctrines are kept in eternal order. But I must still insist that the dictum of the law, as it is written, is not sufficient for our guidance; for if it were, it had need to be written in a character so legible that there should be no possibility of a mistake: but so far from this being the case, I feel sure that if Mr. Burnett and I were to take text by text, we should seldom come to an agreement, unless we appointed a final arbiter between us. Let us turn to Genesis; there we are told that in six days God made the earth: but the idea of work and labour that is here conveyed, is so entirely opposite to every notion which a reasoning mind can have of God, that it is impossible to believe that he makes his great measures work to time. Could not God, had he pleased, have made the whole world in a single breath, as we are told he did in six days? But there are still more objectionable passages than this—passages in which the crimes of men are laid down so minutely, that it is impossible for them to be read without bringing to the cheek of every young person who reads them, the burning blush of shame. And with respect to this, I will relate a circumstance which lately came to my knowledge, and which, if rightly understood, will have more weight than fifty arguments: it was related to me by a gentleman who is a magistrate, and who is in the custom of having a Bible always lying in his servants'-hall. One day, not being able to lay his hand on his own to administer an oath, he sent for the one which belonged to the hall; and then for the first time, discovered that every prurient passage in it had been enriched by the servants' remarks. With such an instance before us, how can we trust the Volume in the hands of the unlearned, who thus wrest it to their own damnation? My argument, with respect to the variety of sects, has not been met at all; unless

Mr. Burnett calls that meeting, when he says that it was from limiting the circulation, and that all that was wanted was to spread the Bible far and wide. But I can see little chance of such a course harmonising the Christian multitude, or that amalgamating the opinions of those who deny the divinity of Christ, with those who contend against the doing of good works, is at all likely to be an effectual process for sublimating the truth.

The Rev. Mr. BURNETT,—I feel disappointed that Mr. O'Leary has not taken up my case. He goes round and round, without approaching to any fixed point, or even attempting to grapple with any of my arguments. He says that the variance among the sects is a proof that the Scriptures ought not to be indiscriminately circulated. Now I ask him, whether that variance is more likely to be set at rest by giving the power to a body of authoritative individuals to dictate to the people whatever faith they think proper, than by giving the Scriptures at once into the hands of the sectarians. His method would only spread through the world; for where the reason of man is to be enlightened, that reason must not be bent before the dicta of any tribunal, but allowed to range at large over all the bearings of the subject which is offered to its contemplation; and on the result of this range it must build its conclusions. And the attempt of authority to supersede this process, can only create increased dissent, and hypocritical conformity. I cannot admit, that any case of abuse arising from the indiscriminate perusal of the Scriptures, furnishes a justification for their limited diffusion. If every passage in Scripture that could be abused, were marked in the way Mr. O'Leary states, by any individual, or by a great number of individuals, it would only shew that such persons wanted the information which the Book contains, and the moral influence which its truths are calculated to exercise over the readers; and instead of taking the Book from such characters, I would press them to read it again and again, that they might find a corrective for that state of mind which had led them to abuse it. If abuses have sprung up in the law of the land, would this be a reason why the bulwarks of justice should be thrown down, and confusion and anarchy allowed to prevail. Abuses have sprung from monarchy, but surely the crown ought not to be put down in order to remove them. Evils, and great

evils too, have arisen from governments, but is this a reason why all governments should be abolished? In this world evils arise from the best and fairest works of man; good without abuse belongs to heaven, not to earth; and the enjoyment of good without evil belongs to angels and not to men. Did the Church of Rome secure the world against abuses, when it swayed a despot's sceptre over the Word of God? What was the state of things when the Scriptures were not indiscriminately circulated? Can we forget the strides which the Church made to absolute power—the thralldom in which it held the human mind—the tyranny it exercised during Europe's darkness, rendering that darkness still more dense? Can we forget the conduct of its Popes, its Cardinals, and its inferior Ecclesiastics; the cabals of its Councils, and the disgrace it brought on the ecclesiastical world? The nations on whom it pronounced its curse, and the Sovereigns it deposed? Whence came this frightful amount of evil? I would say that it arose from the absence of the Scriptures, from the want of a full and indiscriminate circulation, before which these crimes and the criminals that acted in them would have vanished, and their truths would have brought order out of this confusion. Here is an existing proof, then, that a dictatorial ecclesiastical body is incapable of directing the faith and manners of men, without producing mischief more appalling than any thing that Mr. O'Leary has attempted to connect with the indiscriminate circulation of the Scriptures. And since its incompetency has been proved already, ought we again to try the experiment, and allow our reason to be subjected anew to its authority? If the argument from abuses be good for any thing, it will go the destruction of Christianity itself. I will read a passage from Scripture to prove that a crime was found in connexion with the early promulgation of Christianity, of so enormous a character, that the Apostle tells us, it was not so much as named among the Gentiles (1 Cor. v. 1.); or, in other words, I will shew that a crime unknown to paganism had found its first existence among the abuses of Christianity. The passage is as follows:—

“It is reported commonly, that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife; and ye are puffed up,

and have not rather mourned that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you."

As this crime appears to be peculiar to the abuses of Christianity, it might be erroneously supposed to militate against the system; and, therefore, if Mr. O'Leary's argument be carried to its legitimate bearings, he ought to get rid of Christianity altogether, and to take refuge in infidelity. I at once, then, admit, that evil to a frightful amount may spring from the abuse of the Scriptures, just as it sprung from the abuse of Christianity itself; but still I deny that there is any such connexion between the evils complained of, and the free circulation of the Word of life, as should prevent that circulation. On the contrary, I assert, that the evils are to be corrected by such a circulation, just as the Apostle corrected the evil alluded to, by a fuller developement of the Christian system, and not by a more curtailed exhibition of its outlines. It is Mr. O'Leary's duty, however, to point out the connexion between the evils he refers to, which he has not yet done, and the indiscriminate circulation of the Scriptures, and then to shew that the authority to which he would refer us, is calculated to remove these evils. If it be necessary to have a living speaking tribunal, or an authority to refer to, such a tribunal is not found in the Church of Rome. The Pope, it is allowed, is liable to error, even in expounding the faith, as well as in matters of morals and discipline. In like manner, the cardinals, and all the lower grades of ecclesiastics, are allowed to be liable to error. Where, then, are we to find this boasted living, infallible tribunal, which is to preserve the Catholic from abuses arising out of the indiscriminate circulation of the Scriptures? We may ascend from the Parish Priest to the Bishop, thence to the Archbishop, thence to the Cardinal, until we arrive at the Pope himself; and after all, we shall find in the Church of Rome, sure showing, that we are liable to be misled about the point concerning which we wished to be informed. If we are told that a general council, generally received, with the Pope at its head, is an infallible tribunal, the difficulty still remains; for unless this council shall sit *ad infinitum*, we shall have no living infallible authority to which we can refer. The Council of Trent has not sat for centuries; we cannot refer to it; the clergy cannot infallibly interpret its can-

nons and decrees; and, therefore, we need not refer to them for infallible guidance. This boasted tribunal, then, is only the creature of former times, and now constitutes matter of history only. According, therefore, to the views of the Church of Rome herself, we have not the authority to which she commands us to appeal. I do not, of course, admit the infallibility of any human tribunal, but I contend, that any articles of faith, dictated by such a tribunal, however simple, or easily explained, cannot be binding on the human race, if the expounding of such articles are liable to error. I have shown that the Pope is fallible in matters of faith, and if so, it is plain that we cannot have an infallible interpretation of the decrees of any council, since the head of all the interpreters may himself be wrong. If it be said that the clergy of the Church of Rome are likely to interpret the articles of their faith aright, not because they are infallible, but because the articles are few, then they are placed on the same level with ourselves; and the infallibility of the Romish Church at once falls to the ground. Let Mr. O'Leary admit this, or let him direct me to his infallible authority, and I shall show him its fallibility. Mr. O'Leary next argues, from the language in the first chapter of Genesis, that the Creator is represented as labouring like a workman through the day's creation; and that, because the unlearned reader of the Scriptures is liable to take this view of the passage, the Scriptures should not be indiscriminately circulated. He tries to anticipate what I have to say on this subject, by observing, that I will tell you that the words of Moses ought not to be taken in their literal acceptation. In this, however, he was mistaken, for I shall tell you the very reverse. I would say, that the words are to be taken in their literal acceptation; and I would say, that Mr. O'Leary has laboured to misrepresent them. I can see no symptoms of labour conveyed by them. God only pronounced the words, "Let there be light, and there was light." Was there any appearance of labour here? He said, "Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters," and it instantly sprung into existence. Is there any indication of labour here, or any thing that could give an unworthy representation of the Deity, even to the most unlettered reader. God said, "Let the earth bring forth," and it teemed with every production of nature. Every part of the de-

scription is calculated to raise an idea of grandeur and sublimity, and mocks the notion of labour and workmanship. Mr. O'Leary contends, that the laws, under the Jewish economy, displayed a grossness and depravity which poisons the spring of Scriptural knowledge. The laws which were framed in reference to the condition of the Jewish people, are now matter of ambiguity; and so also is the conduct which these laws were to regulate and controul. But they still show that the world had attained to a great pitch of depravity, and had sunk into the most frightful crimes—crimes which the laws alluded to were formed to put down; and the study of laws, when received in connexion with the morality they display, and the guilt they condemn, will be found calculated to exalt and inform, rather than deteriorate and debase. Those passages of Scripture which have been referred to as calculated to injure the general community, only show the honesty and truth with which the sacred writers have laid every thing before us. They have unmasked every mystery, stated every fact, and in doing so, have been guided by the spirit of the God of wisdom and purity; and, therefore, are not to be arraigned as having given to the world that which is calculated to defile. It is true that poison may be extracted from the fairest flower; but as the Word of God contains laws and precepts which condemn the crimes it records, the statement of those crimes cannot be objected to as the source of mischief, nor have we authority to interdict the perusal of the Sacred Record; nor is it possible to read the Word of God for the purpose of picking and culling what are called its grossest features, without perceiving in connexion with them, something of those beauties which are calculated to attract and improve. If we compare, then, all the circumstances of abuse that have arisen from the indiscriminate perusal of the Word of God, they will add strength to the position I am maintaining; and will shew the necessity of a still more indiscriminate circulation of the Sacred Volume.

I will not notice the creeds to which my opponent has referred, though he has misrepresented many of them, and does not appear to understand any of them; however, they supply his lack of argument, and operate as straws thrown up to show which way the wind blows. I shall, however, pursue my course, and keep to the point at

issue. There is one point that Mr. O'Leary has introduced in connection with these creeds, on which I shall make a passing remark. It is the ground of a sinner's justification before God. Mr. O'Leary says, that their views of this subject destroy good works—an old and a hacknied objection to the doctrines of grace. It is not, however, founded on just views either of the principles or practice which it is intended to impugn. The persons who hold the doctrine in question maintain, that their own works cannot merit their acceptance with God, and they depend on the sure and certain basis of the Redeemer's merits. The church of Rome would refer you to the good works of its members, and if it should hesitate to assert that these good works alone can justify, it will at least give them a large share in procuring justification. The doctrine objected to by Mr. O'Leary points to heaven as a free gift, and to the atonement of the cross as the means of securing it. The doctrine maintained by him points to heaven as the reward of the sinner's doings. In the one case the one party receives heaven as a boon, and under circumstances which give to that boon an infinite value; the other party receives heaven as a debt due to him for his labour. The first is influenced by "constraining love," the second is influenced by a feeling that he has won what he has obtained. Now which of these two is most likely to yield the most worthy species of obedience? Surely the man who is influenced by moral motives—a deep sense of gratitude, or a strong feeling of moral attachment; and not the man who, with the spirit of a slave, works merely because he expects to be paid. Such is the superior character of the doctrine which Mr. O'Leary has impugned, as resulting from that indiscriminate reading of the Scriptures; and sure I am, that the more indiscriminately the Scriptures are circulated, the more will the nature of that doctrine be understood, and the more will its value be appreciated. I must observe, before I sit down, that instead of arguments, Mr. O'Leary has offered nothing but insinuations and assumptions, and I do hope that he will now meet some of the arguments I have offered.

MR. O'LEARY.—I have still, Sir, to make the same objection,—that my arguments have not been answered. It is quite clear that the want of unity is incompatible

with truth ; and when Mr. Burnett tells us that he has become a teacher of the Gospel, because he has more time to examine and explain its hidden parts, I confess I cannot see the difference between oral and written commentary. But Mr. Burnett here thought proper to go aside to attack the Church of Rome,—an attack entirely out of the way ; but since he has set the example, I will travel a little out of the way that he may hear something about the state of the Protestant Church in Germany, and thus give him a Roland for his Oliver

“ A large portion of the Protestant Churches of Germany hailed these principles (the principles of rationalism) with delight and spread with eagerness this purer system of Christianity. It was taught by her divines from the pulpit,—by her professors from the chairs,—it was addressed to the old, as the exhortation which was to free them from the weight and burden of ancient prejudices and observances,—and to the young, as that knowledge which alone could make them truly wise, or send them into life with right and rational views. With the exception of Lessing or, at most, one or two others, all the writers to whom I allude, are at least doctors in divinity. Paulus, one of the most atrocious of the party, was professor of divinity at Wurtsburg. I cannot say whether he holds the same office at Heidelberg, where he now resides. De Wett, Kiunoel, Wegsheider, and many others, are professors either ordinary, or extraordinary, in the universities to which they belong. It need not be added, that the Protestant church of that country (Germany), is the mere shadow of a name. For this abdication of Christianity was not confined to either the Lutheran or Calvinistic profession, but extended its baleful and withering influence with equal force over each. It is equally unnecessary to add, that its effects were becoming daily more conspicuous in a growing indifference to Christianity in all ranks and degrees of the nation.

“ They (the rationalizing divines) are bound by no law but their own fancies ; some are more, and some less extravagant ; but I do them no injustice, after this declaration, in saying, that the general inclination and tendency of their opinions (more or less forcibly acted on) is this, that in the New Testament we shall find only the opinions of Christ, and the apostles adapted to the age in which they lived, and not eternal truths ; that Christ himself had neither the design, nor the power of teaching any system which was to endure ; that, when he taught any enduring truth, as he occasionally did, it was without being aware of its nature ; that the apostles understood still less of real religion ; that the whole doctrine, both of Christ and his apostles, as it is directed to the Jews alone, so it was gathered in fact from no other source than the Jewish

philosophy; that Christ himself erred, and his apostles spread his errors, and that, consequently, no one of his doctrines is to be received on their authority; but, that without regard to the authority of the books of Scripture, and their asserted divine origin, each doctrine is to be examined according to the principles of right reason, before it is allowed to be divine.

“It will be sufficient to say, that they who wish to form a notion of the German method of explaining the doctrines of Scripture, as to the Saviour, the atonement, and all the consequent doctrines, need only turn to the page of ecclesiastical history for a record of the various heresies of the early ages, and that they will also find a tolerable picture of them in the most violent English Unitarians. The Trinity, Incarnation, and descent of the Spirit, are positively denied:—Christ was a mere man. The doctrine was not made up or established for nearly the three first ages. The doctrine of the Fall, and of Original Sin, is set aside entirely. God has always raised up men to repress vice and encourage virtue, as, especially, Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, Zeno, Seneca, Marcus Antonius, Zoroaster, Confucius, and Mahomet; but, among all, the greatest reverence is due to Jesus the Nazarene.

“It is expressly acknowledged, that, in Scripture, literally understood, there are some grounds (*Semina*) for the orthodox, as to the two natures in Christ; yet, as such a doctrine is of no use to the attainment of virtue, but rather prejudicial, by diminishing the force of Christ's example, as it contradicts reason, and some other declarations of Scripture, it is better to adopt the other side of the question. All the notions of glorifications are either without ground, or mythical (*fables*), all notion of his atonement is renounced. It appears unnecessary to go through the whole doctrines usually taught by the orthodox churches, as it is obvious, that after these principles, the whole exposition of the doctrine is, and must be Socinian at least.

“Some went so far as to attack the whole body of the prophets as impostors, in the most outrageous and revolting terms. Faith in these deceivers, it is said in one of their books, is ‘the cause of there being no real faith in the world.’ There is a book called, ‘Moses and Jesus,’ by Buchholz, published at Berlin, 1806, in which Moses, especially, is abused, accused first of deceit and then of terrorism. Ammon says, that leaving to philosophers to decide whether the gift of prophecy be possible or not, it is quite clear that Christ himself renounces the power, (*Matt. xxiv. 36. Acts, i. 7.*), and that therefore there are no prophecies of his in the New Testament; that prophecies are recorded in the Bible as uttered by men of doubtful character, as *Numb. xxii. 5. 1 Kings, xxii. 22.*; that many are obscure, and are never fulfilled, and that others seem to have been made after the event, that all are reckoned obscure

and imperfect by the apostles themselves. As these accusations apply, he says, to almost all the prophecies of the Old and New Testament, it must be confessed that the argument from prophecy needs whatever excuse it can find, both in the delirium of the prophets, who were transported out of their sense (John xi. 31. 2 Pet. i. 21.); the double sense in which they are quoted in the New Testament (Matt. ii. 23. Rom. x. 18.), and the remarkable variety of interpretations. Ammon and Wegscheider further say, that Jesus (in Mat. xi. 11. Luke vii. 28.), spoke in terms of contempt of the Hebrew prophets, which is quite untrue. Wegscheider adds, that prophecies would favour fatalism, and that there are no prophecies, properly so called, sufficiently clear in either Testament.

“ With respect to the miracles, when they were urged, as proof of immediate agency, by some they were said to be that mythology which must attend every religion to gain the multitude; by some, the common and well known arguments and ribaldry of the infidel were unsparingly used; by one or more, high in station in the church, some artifice, and probably magnetism, has been within the last ten years suggested. From the less daring, however, the answer was always, either that it was impossible that there should have been a miracle under such circumstances; or that, even allowing Christ to have had the power of working miracles, it was highly improbable that, in the particular case alleged, he would have judged it right to exert it; and secondly, the words were examined, and, by every possible distortion, they were forced into any meaning but their own. Rosenmuller says, that miracles have lost all their force as proofs; and Thies, the translator of the New Testament, says, that neither the conversion of St. Paul, nor the ascension of Christ, will now make converts; for, as the sphere of nature enlarges, miracles vanish. On the conversion of St. Paul, see Bretshneider. Wegscheider says, that the story is so told, that we can make nothing of it, and that we must remember that St. Paul was much inclined to visions and ecstasies. And as to the ascension of Christ, Wegscheider has written expressly to prove it a mythus. Wegscheider says, that *though Christ seemed to the standersby to expire, yet after a few hours, being given up to the sedulous care of friends, he returned to life on the third day.* Paulus tells us, that Christ did not die, but suffered a fainting fit. One person, called Breneck, has written a book, to shew that Christ lived twenty-seven years on earth after his ascension. Another author says, ‘ that although we had better leave things as they are for the vulgar, who must have something extreme to rely on, yet divines should examine and find out the truth; that we see in every religion many *mythi of the generations, incarnations, and apparitions of the gods*; and that they who call Mahomet an imposter, and Zoroaster mad—who laugh at the story of Buddha’s generation

from a virgin, who conceived him by a rainbow—or at Mahomet's discourses with Gabriel, &c. should not be angry if people examine the stories of Enoch, Moses, Sampson, &c. &c., or put the greatest part of what is related of Jesus and the apostles into the class of fables; that the real religion of Jesus is rational, but that when he found that men could not be driven from their views otherwise, he began to assume a supernatural authority, and play the part of a prophet, and afterwards took up that of the Messiah, because some of his admirers thought he must be the person.' Afterwards, 'he decides, that it was most probable Jesus had deceived himself, and was really persuaded himself, that he did possess supernatural powers, and that he was thus an enthusiast in the best sense.'

"We see," says Luther, "that through the malice of the devil, men are now more avaricious, more cruel, more disorderly, more insolent, and much more wicked, than they were under popery." (In Postil. Dom. part 1; Dom. 2, Adv.)—"If any one wish," says Musculus, "to see a multitude of knaves, disturbers of the public peace, &c., let him go to a city where the Gospel is preached in its purity," (he means a reformed city); "for it is clearer than the light of the day, that never were pagans more vicious and disorderly than those professors of the Gospel." (Dom. 1. Adv.)—"The thing," says Melancthon, "speaks for itself. In this country, among the reformed, their whole time is devoted to intemperance and drunkenness (*immanibus poculis*). So deeply are the people sunk into barbarity and ignorance, that many of them would imagine that they should die in the night, if they should chance to fast in the day."—Ad. cap. 6. lat.) Neither was this growth of vice and ignorance confined to foreign kingdoms. "In this nation," says Stubbs, (Motives of Good Works, with an Epistle dedicatorie to the Lord Mayor of London, an. 1596,) after he had made the tour of England, "I found a general decay of good works, or rather a plain defection or falling away from God. For good works, who sees not that they (the papists of former times) were far before us, and we far behind them?"—Erasmus thus describes the fruits of the reformation: he was, indeed a Catholic; but a Catholic whom the Protestants allow to have been impartial. "And who," says he, are those Gospel people?—Look around you, and shew me one, who, once a glutton, is now turned sober; one, who, before violent, is now meek; one, who, before avaricious, is now generous; one who, before impure, is now chaste. I can point out multitudes who are worse than they were before. * * * * What tumults and seditions mark their conduct! For what trifles do they fly to arms! St. Paul commanded the first Christians to shun the society of the wicked; and, behold! the reformers seek most the society of the most corrupted; these are their delight. The Gospel now flourishes, forsooth, because priests and monks take wives in

opposition to human laws, and in despite of their sacred vows." Capito, a great partisan of Luther, (Epist. ad Farrell, int. Calv. p. 5.) writes thus to Farrell, a leader among the Calvinists: "I acknowledge the great evils which we have occasioned in the church, by rejecting, with so much imprudence and precipitation, the authority of the Pope. The people is now without bridle or curb, and despises all authority; as if by abolishing the papacy, we had suppressed, in the same manner, the power of the servants of the church, and the efficacy of the sacraments! Every one now exclaims—I have enough to guide myself! As I have the Gospel to lead me to the discovery of Jesus Christ and his doctrines, what need I of other help?"—"All the waters of the Elbe," Melancthon writes to one of his correspondents, (Melancth. Ep. 1, iv. Ep. 100—129,) "would not give me sufficient tears to bewail the miseries of the reformation." Bishop Burnett gives the following view of the state of morality in England, in the reign of Edward VI. (History of the Reformation, part 2, p. 226.)—"The sins of England did, at that time, call down from heaven heavy curses." They are sadly expressed in a discourse that Ridley wrote after, under the title, "Of the Lamentation of England:" he says, that "lechery, oppression, pride, covetousness, and a hatred and scorn of all religion, were generally spread among all people; but chiefly those of higher rank."—"Lechery," says Latimer, "is used in England, and such lechery, as is used in no other part of the world. And it is made a matter of sport, a trifle, not to be passed on or reformed." Luther describes his conduct and feelings, while he remained within the pale of the Catholic religion, and observed the rules of his order:—"When I lived in my monastery, I punished my body with watching, fasting, and prayer; I observed my vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience. Whatsoever I did, it was with singleness of heart; with good zeal, and for the glory of God, &c. I feared grievously the last day, and was, from the bottom of my heart, desirous of being saved." (Ad Gal.) After he had commenced reformer:—"I am burnt," he said, "with the flames of my untamed flesh; I am mad almost with the rage of lust, and the desire of women. I, who ought to be fervent in spirit, am fervent in impurity, in sloth, &c. (In Col. Mens.) Relying on the strong foundation of my learning, I yield not, in pride, either to the emperor, prince, or devil; no, not to the universe itself."—(Resp. ad Maled. Regni Angliæ.) Fletcher's translation of these three passages.—*Sermons, vol. 2. p. 116, 117.*

If such things as these, Sir, are consequent upon unlimited circulation, does it not stand to reason that the Scriptures require some comment, and that some standard should be erected, by which all men may be guided? I do not at present contend that that standard should be the

Church of Rome, but at least let there be some guide to settle these difficult points. But I will not now argue any further, Sir. What I contend is, that we must run into this confusion, or else submit to some authority;—and which is the more preferable thing? Truth, which is but one, can only exist in one portion of believers, and consequently only appertains to the smaller part of the Christian world, while the remainder are left to lose their way in the mazes of ignorance.

The Rev. Mr. BURNETT.—Mr. O'Leary says he has answered my arguments, and only left me a few wanderings of the fancy. He reminds me of the soldier who thought he had obtained a triumph, and called out to his companions in arms, "I have taken a prisoner." They answered, "Then bring him here." He replied, "He'll not go with me." They rejoined, "Then come yourself;" but the victor exclaimed, "He will not let me go." This is just the way Mr. O'Leary has attempted to deal with my arguments. Because he could not answer me, he has brought against me a host of German infidels, whose case you will perceive has nothing to do with the subject. I admit that there are infidels in Germany as well as every where else; but I deny that their infidelity has been produced by the free circulation of the Scriptures. The infidelity of Germany, on which he has dwelt so much, may be traced to a very different source. In the transition from a bad to a good system, evil will always be found to arise, as some of the evils which adhered to the bad systems find their way into the good one. This has been the case in Germany. The old system was the system of the Church of Rome, which interdicted the indiscriminate circulation of the Scriptures; the new system is the system of the reformation which enjoins their indiscriminate circulation; and the weeds which belonged to the old system are more rank because more exposed than the new; they are more prominent, just because those who plant them are allowed to display them with impunity; while in the old they were compelled to conceal them by the terror of an authority which did not destroy their existence, or neutralise their moral mischief. The infidelity of Germany has arisen out of the attempts made by the Church of Rome to teach her absurdities and follies as the meaning of Scripture, and not out of what

the Scriptures exhibit to the inspection of their readers. What misled Voltaire and all who followed him in the scheme of infidelity, but the absurd and irrational theology of Rome, and the innumerable abuses with which its machinery was clogged. Those great minds chose rather to burst their fetters and cling to scepticism, than prostrate themselves at the shrine of a system which was too absurd to be countenanced by minds that were capable of thinking, and too despotic to be obeyed by minds that felt the thrill of independence? A church professing to supply such a commentary on the Word of God as that which Rome gives to her votaries, makes such individuals lift their voices both against the text and the commentator; and hence the origin of continental infidelity. If these men had been acquainted with the Scriptures by their general circulation, they would have seen the folly of being guided by interpreters, who had not made them the subject of deep and anxious inquiry; and their indiscriminate circulation would have produced such a flood of light upon their excellence, as would have compelled those men who disputed their moral authority, to study them with greater attention than they had previously thought it necessary to bestow on them; and their scepticism would have been lost in the obedience of an enlightened and a rational faith. Their infidelity, therefore, has no connection with the universal and uncontroled circulation of the Sacred Volume; but just on the contrary it proves the necessity of such a circulation. School all Germany by the general circulation of the Word of God, and you will find infidelity disappear, and you will see the infidel and his pupils brought back to a purer and a more wholesome tone of feeling, as well as to a more accurate and a more conclusive mode of thinking. But if we wrest the Scriptures from them because they pervert their meaning, the remedy we apply for the purpose of effecting a cure will make the disease eternal. Since Mr. O'Leary has been driven from the argument which he would draw from divisions among Christians, he asks what species of unity is supposed to exist among them? for he sees I admit that unity to some extent must exist. I answer, that it is not a unity in form, but in reality—such a unity as binds man to his fellow under the influence of feelings of brotherly kindness, and creates an attachment in the family thus united to its common God. It is such a unity

as the gracious discoveries of revelation are calculated to form, and such a unity as the moral precepts of revelation are calculated to establish ; and just such a unity are the general principles of the Word of God fitted to effect among all Christians, whatever may be their differences as to particular forms, or the interpretation of particular passages of Scripture.

But can this unity be produced by the standard which the Church of Rome gives ? If her decrees are thundered from the Vatican, and professedly received by her subjects, does it follow that this profession implies unity either of views or of feelings ? No—such an united profession may exist in the midst of the most conflicting feelings and sentiments ? Let us look to the members of this professedly united church, and in examining their unity, we shall find it made up of conflicting variety. Did not that church give birth to the divisions and contentions of the Franciscans and Dominicans, the Jansenists and the Jesuits, and a thousand other parties, remarkable only for the difference of their sentiments, the cordiality of their mutual hatred, and the fury of their mutual opposition ? The church of Rome has produced a greater variety of parties and opinions than Protestantism, with this difference between the two—that a greater degree of rancour, and a more noisy opposition distinguished the parties of the Romish church, than it ever fell to the lot of Protestantism to lament in her communion. If, then, the church of Rome produced such troubled waters, need we wonder at the ocean of error by which we have been over-run ? The world has rung again with the divisions of her members, and she has thus supplied us with a decided demonstration that the standard she got up for securing her unity has never practically succeeded. I fling these evils, therefore, against the argument which Mr. O'Leary has produced from Protestant sectarianism, and while I insist that they belong to the Church of Rome, I maintain no tribunal such as she would wish to set up, can be successful in destroying them. They exist ; he cannot deny their existence ; and while they exist, his argument falls upon his own head.

Let us speak of the tendency of Scripture from itself. Mr. O'Leary says that its tendency is pernicious, if not watched by an authority which we have proved to have

failed in its attempt to watch it. But the Apostle tells us, that

“ All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” 2 Tim. iii. 16.)

This is the judgment of an inspired writer on the tendency of the Old Testament alone ; for that was the only part of Scripture that had been published to the world at that day ; and now, when the Revelation of God is completed by the addition of the New Testament Scriptures, and when the economy of grace has been fully developed, we are told that the Scriptures are not profitable to teach, reprove, correct, and instruct, or to make the man of God perfect.

But we are informed that their tendency is pernicious, and that their circulation must be watched by a court that has excelled in corruption all the courts of our world ; and we are told that their indiscriminate diffusion would afford a scope to every evil which they were written to oppose. Such is the contrast between the views adopted by Mr. O’Leary, and that recorded by an inspired apostle on the tendency of the Scripture. And while I agree with Paul, and dissent from Mr. O’Leary, I must maintain that the Scriptures are calculated to produce the interesting and Christian unity I have described. But what is the nature of the unity of which Mr. O’Leary speaks ? it must be unity founded on authority, and if that authority merely gives forth opinions without pretending to the rights of enforcing them, then it leads men to the exercise of their private judgment, and we shall then have variety of sentiment. But if this authority insists on the right to enforce the reception of the opinions it delivers, I must remind Mr. O’Leary that this is impossible. Though a man can, as a member of the body politic, yield to the constituted authorities, yet while he is a thinking being, he cannot yield to authority in matters of sentiment. He will weigh the arguments that may be laid before him, and canvass the opinions he is called upon to believe ; but unless his mind is convinced he is as incapable of acquiescing in the dictates of authority, as he is of annihilating his being by an act of his

will. The circulation of the Scriptures furnishes the means of examining, of thinking, of weighing evidence, and of supplying light and truth, and information and conviction must follow. But mere authority supplies no such material, and therefore, though obedience may be possessed, truth is not seen, nor conviction felt. Such a species of obedience is both unmanly and degrading, and the Scriptures bear their protest against it. They produce information on the attributes of Deity; they proclaim his kindness, they reveal his Son, they describe the readiness with which he appeared to offer himself as the Saviour of the world, they appeal to our gratitude while they unfold the proofs of love, they record his promises, they announce his laws, they anticipate and predict the revolutions of time, and they draw the veil from the mysteries, and unfold the glories of eternity; and in this interesting groupe of subjects, they hold out a field to the mind, in which it can employ all its intellectual and moral energies, and in which it is prepared for a joyous immortality, and in which it yields the homage of an enlightened obedience. This is the obedience which the Scriptures command us to render to the God whom they reveal; and this is the obedience out of which Christian unity gathers all its strength. Of this unity the Roman Catholic system knows nothing; the unity by which it is distinguished, is a unity in the midst of which each may be found corrupting in his own grave, without being able to sympathise with his fellow, or to offer the hand that would minister a common relief. The unity prescribed by the Catholic church, is opposed to apostolic unity; for the apostolic unity admitted of differences which the church of Rome does not allow. You will find a lesson of Christian liberality on this species of unity, addressed to us by the apostle in his epistle to the Romans, in the beginning of the fourth chapter,

“ Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations. For one believeth that he may eat all things; another who is weak, eateth herbs. Let not him that eateth, despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not, judge him that eateth; for God hath received him. Who art thou that judgest another man's servant ?”

[This is not the language of the Church of Rome, or any of her authoritative tribunals].

“To his own master he standeth or falleth; yea, he shall be holden up; for God is able to make him stand.”

Here variety of sentiment is actually allowed, and the persons addressed by the apostle are commanded not to have doubtful disputations on that account, so far was he from harshly condemning want of unity in minor matters; he left that for the Church of Rome. The irrational unity contended for by that church, which is merely a unity in appearance, conceals the real sentiments of her members, and prevents the correction of her errors. When I see infidelity united in a close compact against the Word of God, I can oppose it, and meet it with evidence until its scepticism is compelled to yield to truth. It has assumed a distinct shape and an open boldness with which we can grapple, and we may expect that truth shall triumph in the conflict; but when I am met by a man in a mask, who tells me that he submits to an authoritative tribunal which teaches him what he understands not, and compels him to profess belief in the absence of light and evidence, I feel that I have come in contact with one who has ceased to be a moral agent—who has volunteered to become a machine, and with whom I can have no rational dealings in the question at issue between us. Upon such a one truth and reason can have no effect, and you must abandon him to his ignorance. I speak not of Roman Catholics universally; some of them are better than their system. I could mention names within the pale of that church who have been ornaments to human nature and the Christian profession; but the man who is really a Roman Catholic, in the ordinary acceptation of that phrase, including, as it does, submission to the authority for which Mr. O’Leary has been contending, is certainly the unmanly, the unchristian, and the irrational machine to which I have just alluded. When I see men thus misled, it is my duty to speak of the system that has misled them with moral scorn; I wish to awaken them from its delusions; to lead them from its bewildering worship, and to conduct them to that essential temple of which Christ is the living head; and I reject all comments on the Scriptures that do not harmonize with me in this object. Mr. O’Leary has said, that I have become a religious teacher merely to explain the mysterious parts of the Scriptures. That, however, I must remind him is not my peculiar office. I do offer my sentiments on mysterious parts of

Scripture as he describes them, when I meet them in the course of my ministrations, but I do not insist that my interpretation must be adopted. However, I am not generally employed in explaining mysteries. I wish to shew my hearers how they can be saved; how they are to live on earth, and how they are to grow in meetness for heaven. These are the points which I keep in view in my general ministrations; and for what I say on these subjects, I always refer my audience to my authority, which is not a human tribunal, but the inspired Word of God. To that Sun I always direct them; and I wish them to see it, not obscured by the mists that human authority too often raises around it, but I wish them to see it clear and cloudless, and I wish so to direct its rays to my instructions, that if a flaw exist in them, it may be detected and exposed; and should I teach darkness instead of light, I know that in pointing to the Word of God, I introduce an instrument that will unmask my fallacies, and enable my hearers to spurn them away from them. While I believe this to be the legitimate use of the Scriptures, I wish to know why they should not be allowed to appear in the cabins of the poor, as well as in the mansions of the rich, and why they should not speak to the young as well as to the old; and to these questions you perceive Mr. O'Leary has furnished you with no reply. I therefore call upon him again to meet the arguments I have adduced.

Mr. O'LEARY.—If this, Sir, be unity, as Mr. Burnett has endeavoured to explain it, we are without unity at all. Is it unity to believe with the Socinian, or with all those that vary from point to point with each other. I must confess that I do not understand my learned antagonist's principle of unity, and yet I strove to keep my reasoning as cool as possible. Is it unity of faith? No! Is it unity of doctrine? No! Is it unity of outward signs? No! The Scriptures, Mr. Burnett says, contain all that is necessary for our salvation. So they do: but suppose I interpret some passage wrong, that passage no longer points out to me the way I may be saved: and am I, therefore, to lose all chance of being saved? In one place we are told that God is vengeful; but surely this is not to be understood literally: and so, in other passages, there are things which to understand rightly, we must understand metaphorically; and yet, with every one of those, by be-

ing left to ourselves, we are liable to run into the same mistake. Let us, for instance, take the Song of Solomon. How does that begin?

“The song of songs, which is Solomon’s. Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth: for thy love is better than wine. Because of the savour of thy good ointments thy name is as ointment poured forth, therefore do the virgins love thee. Draw me, we will run after thee: the king hath brought me into his chambers: we will be glad and rejoice in thee, we will remember thy love more than wine: the upright love thee. I am black, but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon. Look not upon me, because I am black, because the sun hath looked upon me: my mother’s children were angry with me; they made me keeper of the vineyards; but my own vineyard have I not kept. Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou maketh thy flock to rest at noon: for why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of thy companions? If thou know not, O thou fairest among women, go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock, and feed thy kids beside the shepherds’ tents. I have compared thee, O my love, to a company of horses in Pharaoh’s chariots. Thy cheeks are comely with rows of jewels, thy neck with chains of gold. We will make thee borders of gold, with studs of silver. While the king sitteth at his table, my spikenard sendeth forth the smell thereof. A bundle of myrrh is my well beloved unto me: he shall lie all night betwixt my breasts.”

The CHAIRMAN.—Does Mr. O’Leary intend to read the whole of the song? I would suggest that that hardly comes into fair argument.

Mr. O’LEARY.—I have just done, Sir. There are but a few words more.

“My beloved is unto me as a cluster of camphire in the vineyards of Engedi. Behold, thou art fair, my love; behold, thou art fair, thou hast dove’s eyes. Behold, thou art fair, my beloved, yea, pleasant; also, our bed is green.”

But, Sir, I will read no further: all I ask is, if this were put into a young person’s hands, what else could he suppose it to be than a love song? and yet, on looking at the head of the chapter, in this London edition of the Bible, and which is dedicated to the most high and mighty Prince James, I find it announced that it contains “The church’s love unto Christ. She confesseth her deformity, and prayeth to be directed to his flock.” But these are

not the only passages : there are hundreds of others, and therefore I do deprecate most strongly the general circulation of the Scriptures without note or comment. Again, from the 9th chapter of Romans, and elsewhere, it would appear, without explanation, as if God had made his choice from the beginning whom he would save, which appears entirely contradictory of any idea of that pure and loving spirit with which I believe the Maker to be imbued towards all. These are the proofs of the consequences of the dissemination of the Scriptures, and I call on Mr. Burnett to prove that their indiscriminate circulation must not, and does not, sow the seeds of infidelity. I call upon Mr. Burnett to controvert the position with which I set out, and to which I now return, that the Bible does not accord with the common principles of human philosophy.

The Rev. Mr. BURNETT.—I stated from the outset, that abuses have arisen out of the indiscriminate circulation of the Scriptures. It is quite unnecessary, therefore, for Mr. O'Leary to insist upon that topic. I fully and frankly admit it. But I still deny that this fact is any reason why that circulation should be limited or controuled by any authoritative tribunal ; and Mr. O'Leary has not attempted to meet my denial. He has shewn how easily texts of Scripture can be perverted ; or rather, he has read for you how German infidels pervert them. I could follow him in this, without at all injuring my argument. He may perhaps have heard of Dean Swift's perversion of two texts, by which he proved to a gentleman that he ought to hang himself. He took one from the history of Judas, "Judas went out and hanged himself ;" and he took the other from the Saviour's commendation of a good character, whom he held up for imitation, when he said, "Go thou, and do likewise ;" now the Dean united these two texts, and pressed upon his friend the necessity they laid him under of committing suicide. If what the Dean did for his amusement were done by another in seriousness, I should not be disposed to admit the inference which my friend would draw from the circumstance. I do not deny that perversions of Scripture abound ; nay, I go further, and admit that they have worked the perdition of many ; but I assert that the more you obstruct their circulation, the more you prevent the

general family of man from being delivered from the effects of the perversion in question. In the 2d epistle of Peter (iii. 15, to end) perversion, and the effect of perversion, are clearly laid down. Here then is a case where the perversion of the Scriptures is the cause of the ruin of the reader. I go thus far without hesitation, or fear of the ultimate success of my argument. Nay, this conduct establishes my argument. Was not this a fair opportunity of telling the world, that the Scriptures were not to be indiscriminately circulated, since their contents had led to such serious evils? Was this not a fair opportunity for commanding submission to the living authoritative tribunal of the Church of Rome? But it is singular that the inspired apostle never throws out a hint or a surmise on the subject, though the evils arising from perverted interpretation were actually staring him in the face, and connected with the ruin of the reader. I may notice here also, that the perversions in question were not the perversions of the ignorant, from whom the Scriptures are so carefully kept, but the perversions of those who had learning enough to criticise, to "wrest" the Scriptures, to put their words to the "torture." The close of this passage, instead of directing to the authority of Rome, merely warns against being misled by the perverters. If, then, the Scriptures are to be indiscriminately given to the multitude, and as the sun which shines upon the evil and the good, and the rain which descends upon the just and upon the unjust, this passage is plain and intelligible. But if they are to be limited by human authority, it is absolutely without meaning; and the whole context is unaccountably defective. I have stated that the essential doctrines of Christianity are the grand springs of Christian unity, and Mr. O'Leary asks whether I would unite with the Socinians, I answer that Socinianism denies the essential doctrines of Christianity, and therefore I have no sympathy with Socinianism. He will therefore not serve his argument by the discovery of a breach of Christian unity in my dissent from the tenets of Socinianism, as I do not consider Socinianism to be Christianity. Mr. O'Leary has said that truth is one, and cannot exist in variety. Now I allow this; but I hold that every part of truth is not essential to salvation; and I maintain that so much of truth as is necessary to salvation, is held by Christians of various denominations, and is one, and the same

among them all, and therefore is not violated by their divisions. Mr. O'Leary objects to my references to the church of Rome, in my remarks on clerical authority and clerical monopoly ; but his line of argument rendered these references necessary. He urged the necessity of an infallible authoritative tribunal, where decisions should be final on the interpretations of the Scriptures ; and this led me at once to the authority claimed by the Church of Rome, as the species of tribunal to which he alluded. If that tribunal can set at rest all the differences of which Mr. O'Leary so heavily complains ; if it can put down infidelity, and harmonise the professors of Christianity, I would consider these circumstances to be evidence of its divine origin ; but as I find that instead of this, it has generated infidelity, and sown divisions among the professors of Christianity, I must object to its operations and its claims. As I knew this is Mr. O'Leary's tribunal, for which he has been arguing, I was compelled to go to Rome with him, in order to ascertain what would be the meaning and uses of such an establishment ; and let me now ask what it has done ? That infallible authority, which he deems essential to Christian peace and Christian purity, has not even pretended to give an infallibly correct commentary. There is not one in existence on which the Church of Rome can lay her hand, and say, " this is infallibly correct." That Church has not given an infallibly correct edition of the Bible itself ; for there is not a Hebrew Bible, nor a Greek Testament extant, on which she can lay her hand, and say, " this is infallibly correct." She has not even produced an infallibly correct translation for the instruction of her members. The Council of Trent, indeed, pronounced the Vulgate to be authentic. But that council was afraid to go further. Since, then, this infallible authority has done nothing for the instruction of its disciples, we must look for another, and if Mr. O'Leary cannot point to it, where is the authority for which he is contending, by which the harmony and unity of which he boasts may be accomplished ? But when no such authority is, or has been in existence, it is useless to protest against the circulation of the Scriptures, on the ground that such an authority has interdicted it. Since I find this to be the case, we must, in the absence of such an authority, go back to the old Protestant, and scriptural, and rational principle, that every man should examine and

read for himself, under the impression of the awful and solemn fact, that he is responsible to God for every judgment he forms, every practice he observes, and every feeling he entertains. This is the most powerful tribunal, and the tribunal likely to exercise the strongest moral influence. When men search for truth at the peril of eternal damnation, they are most likely to employ that seriousness which will lead them to the object of their desires. Before I conclude, I must object to a clerical monopoly of the Scriptures, because I believe the clergy to be parties peculiarly interested in the case. They have to support their order, to maintain their power, and they have temptations, too, to increase their wealth by an unhallowed use of the Scriptures ; and they wish to occupy a pedestal of their own, that would raise them above the multitude, and secure for them a lasting ascendancy. On these grounds I object to them as monopolists ; and I would say, commit the Scriptures to the whole body of the people, and let the general perusal of them, chastise the pride of the clergy, and prevent them from arrogantly assuming a power which belongs to the God of heaven, and was never intended to be enjoyed by the inhabitants of the earth. Instruct the people, and the clergy must keep their place, and duly administer the functions of their office. When the clergy had secured a monopoly of the Word of God, how did they discharge the duties connected with their trust ? Need I point to the dark ages, and ask how they executed their trust then ?—Need I direct your attention to the fanaticism which prevailed, and which they for their own purposes too often encouraged ! or to the means by which they shook the throne of almost every potentate in Europe, and held their minds, as well as those of their subjects, in the deadliest thralldom ? I am fully justified in saying, that they abused the trust committed to them, and that they do not deserve to have the monopoly again. I carry the evidence of their doings with me, and I go at once to the principles and the practice of the Bible Societies, and say that the Scriptures to do most good, must be widely and indiscriminately circulated. And I leave the audience to judge how far I have succeeded in making out a case for the free circulation of the Word of God.

Mr. O'LEARY.—I must still complain, that although Mr. Burnett has indulged himself with several episodes, he has not answered my objection relative to misinterpretation :

on the contrary, if he has done any thing, he has admitted their correctness. Mr. Burnett has spoken of the council held at Jerusalem, and has tried to prove that it was held to settle points of discipline, and not of faith; but even suppose he were correct, and that the council was called to decide points of discipline, then, *a fortiori*, there would be a greater necessity for some council to decide the points of faith, because faith is of a hundred times more importance than all the discipline in the world. But what I chiefly complain of is, that Mr. Burnett has not replied to those texts which suggest to the minds of men doubts, not only that a part, but that the whole of the Scripture is to be taken in a literal sense. This is the mean feature of my case which Mr. Burnett has not met, and till he does meet it, I hold that I have the best of the argument.

The Rev. Mr. BURNETT.—The Rev. Gentleman here briefly but forcibly recapitulated the leading points of his arguments. In closing the whole, said he, I again assert what I have already proved, that the only cure for the evils which have sprung from Christianity is the unlocking of its treasures; the opening of the Sacred Volume for the inspection of all. We have seen the state of the world when the Scriptures were not circulated; we hear the church that then ruled say that her members were not yet fit for receiving them; and though she says she has been teaching for 1800 years, she turns round and tells you that her subjects are too ignorant for receiving the record of their faith. It is, therefore, high time that she should be dismissed for her incompetency. What would be said of any teacher among ourselves who should assert the incapacity of his pupils for making use of their text-books after many years instruction under his tuition? or what would be said of our universities, if, after keeping their students year after year within their walls, they should tell us they were not capable of being allowed free access to the depositories of knowledge? We should dismiss the teacher, and should despise and desert the universities, just as we should desert the Church of Rome. My arguments are all untouched by Mr. O'Leary, and as my case has been completely established, I shall take no advantage of the winding up. In conclusion, I must express my gratification that a London audience has heard what an Irish Roman Catholic can say against the circulation of the Scriptures; and I must observe, that as Mr. O'Leary has often

heard me on this subject, while I never had an opportunity of hearing him, he has had that advantage over me, though it has not assisted his cause. I am also glad that an English audience has seen how an Irish religious controversy can be conducted. You see we do not fight: and I assure you that in our own country we are equally peaceable. You have therefore nothing to fear when you hear of our Irish controversies. Rest assured that nothing but good can be produced by the agitation of a question which must lead to truth. I like to see the stagnant waters agitated, their motion has a redeeming influence upon them, and preserves them from corruption. I must say, at the close of the discussion, that although the free circulation of the Scriptures may have been abused, any interdiction that may be put upon their circulation will only aggravate the evils which it pretends to cure.

The conclusion of this speech was followed with marks of approbation.

The CHAIRMAN said, he believed it was not expected he should deliver his opinion on the arguments which had come to a close. He had certainly formed his own opinion, but it would not have influenced the parties as to their future conduct. They had, however, thought that it was not prudent or advisable to continue the discussion farther; and therefore, while he thanked those present for the attention they had given to the business of the day, he had at the same time to intimate that the meeting was dissolved.

On the motion of Mr. O'LEARY, seconded by Mr. BURNETT, thanks were voted to the gallant General for his impartial conduct in the Chair, after which the company dispersed.

The Discussion occupied upwards of four hours, and seemed to be listened to with deep attention by the meeting.

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