

your children as to wave every other consideration, and to choose for their sponsors those persons alone who truly fear and serve God; if some of you who love God, and love one another, agree to perform this office of love for each other's children; and if all you who undertake it perform it faithfully, with all the wisdom and power God hath given you; what a foundation of holiness and happiness may be laid, even to your late posterity! Then it may justly be hoped, that not only you and your house, but also the children which shall be born, shall serve the Lord.

ATHLONE,
August 6, 1752.

THOUGHTS

ON

THE CONSECRATION OF CHURCHES AND BURIAL-GROUNDS.

1. It has been a custom for some ages, in Roman Catholic countries, to have a particular form of consecration for all churches and chapels: And not for these only, but for every thing pertaining to them; such as fonts, chalices, bells, sacerdotal vestments, and churchyards in particular. And all these customs universally prevailed in England, as long as it was under the Papal power.

2. From the time of our Reformation from Popery, most of these customs fell into disuse. Unconsecrated bells were rung without scruple, and unconsecrated vestments worn. But some of them remained still; the consecration of churches and churchyards in particular; and many scrupled the performing divine service in an unconsecrated church,

and could not consent that their bodies should be buried in unconsecrated ground.

3. Accordingly, the consecrating of churches and churchyards has been practised in England ever since. But it is a thing purely indifferent, being neither forbidden nor established by law. The case is different in Ireland. While the Earl of Strafford was Lord Lieutenant of that kingdom, a law was made for the consecration, not only of churches, but of churchyards also. And a form of consecration for both was inserted in the Common Prayer-Book, which is used at this day; much resembling that which Archbishop Laud used in the consecration of St. Katherine Creed's church, in London.

4. But such a law has never passed in England, much less been inserted in our Common Prayer-Book. However, such consecration has been generally practised, though not authorized by the legislature. "Is it then illegal?" That word is capable of a twofold meaning. It may mean, either, without any law in its favour, or, against law. I do not conceive it to be illegal in the latter sense. Perhaps it is in the former: I do not know any law that enjoins or even permits it.

5. And certainly, as it is not enjoined by the law of the land, so it is not enjoined by the law of God. Where do we find one word in the New Testament enjoining any such thing? Neither do I remember any precedent of it in the purest ages of the Church. It seems to have entered, and gradually spread itself, with the other innovations and superstitions of the Church of Rome. "Do you think it, then, a superstitious practice?" Perhaps it is not, if it be practised as a thing indifferent. But if it be done as a necessary thing, then it is flatly superstitious.

6. For this reason I never wished that any Bishop should consecrate any chapel or burial-ground of mine. Indeed, I should not dare to suffer it; as I am clearly persuaded the thing is wrong in itself, being not authorized either by any law of God, or by any law of the land. In consequence of which, I conceive, that either the clerk or the sexton may as well consecrate the church or the churchyard, as the Bishop.

7. With regard to the latter, the churchyard, I know not who could answer that plain question: "You say, this is consecrated ground, so many feet broad, and so many long. But pray how deep is the consecrated ground?"—"Deep!

What does that signify?" O, a great deal: For if my grave be dug too deep, I may happen to get out of the consecrated ground: And who can tell what unhappy consequences may follow from this?

8. I take the whole of this practice to be a mere relic of Romish superstition. And I wonder that any sensible Protestant should think it right to countenance it; much more, that any reasonable man should plead for the necessity of it! Surely, it is high time now that we should be guided, not by custom, but by Scripture and reason.

DUMFRIES,
May 14, 1788.

END OF THE TENTH VOLUME.