

From the Catholic Advocate.

THE TRUE CHURCH.

[CONTINUED.]

The fact, that these extraordinary powers were left by Jesus Christ with his ministry, in order to preserve the deposit of his doctrines and the sacred rites or sacraments which he instituted, to feed his flock, as with a divine nourishment, and to watch over and govern all believers, keeping them members of one society and one holy communion, proves conclusively, that his promises to send the Spirit of Truth to abide with them, and to be himself with them, aiding and assisting, were intended to enable them to accomplish these solemn and important duties with unflinching success. A preservation of his true doctrines, a due administration of his ordinances, or sacraments, and a correct and beneficial exercise of pastoral authority, could not be insured, unless, with the body of pastors, united under their visible head, Christ co-operated effectually. And this effectual co-operation, so necessary and indispensable, is what the Catholic Church has ever claimed, and now continues to claim, as the bulwark of her authority. The great powers left with the body of pastors would be ineffectual, and even dangerous, without this divine co-operation. If the flock were subjected, without limit or qualification, to their authority and guidance as a united body, and required to obey under penalty of being reputed with heathens and infidels, and their authority was erring and fallible, it would be little better than "the blind leading the blind," and all might "fall into the ditch together." But if their high and extraordinary powers, & their authority to guide and govern, be protected by the abiding presence and effective co-operation of Christ himself, in obeying them, we obey him, and we cannot be led astray, unless Christ himself can conduct us to perdition.

And why would the Redeemer give such powers, make such promises, and then require obedience, if he foresaw into what condition Christendom would be brought by yielding obedience to those who should claim to be his ministers,—a condition, as Protestants pretend, of universal perjury; that is, the whole Christian world, for centuries together, recognizing the supremacy of the Pope, the unerring authority of the Church, and all the present doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church? Protestants admit that Christians believe and practised as Catholics do at present, from a very remote antiquity, indeed almost from the first ages of the Church. Christ must have foreseen that this would be the case, and why did he devise no measures to prevent this sudden pretended ruin, and continue perversion, of the pure principles of his Gospel? On the contrary, why does the very first constitution of the Church, in its primary elements, show a character and authority in the ministry, requiring respect and obedience from the faithful; an authority, not to be contemned without despising Christ,—and an obedience, not to be refused by those who would not be classed with the heathen and unbeliever? We have a right

to conclude that the Christian Church was organized and perpetuated precisely as its Divine Founder desired and intended; that the laws by which it has been governed for ages, were enacted with heaven-directed prudence and wisdom; that its decisions, on matters of faith, were always in accordance with the doctrines first revealed and delivered to the body of witnesses, teachers & ministers, by the great "Author and finisher of faith;" that "the gates of Hell" have never prevailed against the Church, according to his promises; and that Christians, at any given period of time since the first establishment of the Church, were always safe, and only safe, when submitting to its guidance. Those things must be admitted true, by those who admit, that the ancient prophecies, which foretold the establishment and extended and persevering triumph and glory of Christ's kingdom, have been verified, and that the labours and revelations of the Saviour, for the redemption and regeneration of the human race, have been made effectual. For otherwise, it must be maintained that faith perished, and the Church became the synagogue of Satan, soon after the death of Christ and his Apostles.

The great powers left with his ministry, as proved from scripture, show therefore, that Christ designed to confer the attribute of infallibility, which the Church has always claimed, as the consequence of his direct and unqualified promise to be with her till the consummation of time.

Other arguments might be erected on those texts of scripture, which set forth the unity which the Saviour designed to exist among his followers. His fold was to be one,* his kingdom to stand undivided; his disciples were to love one another, to avoid divisions, dissensions, heresies and schisms: for this he prayed to his Father; to this he referred as a characteristic mark, to convince the world of his Divine mission. Unity in the Church can only be secured by submission to authority. If Christ desired unity, he also desired this submission to authority, for he who wishes the end must also wish the means. The authority would be incompetent without his divine aid and co-operation to render it a true and safe guide in the concerns of Faith. But if the authority be made a true and safe guide in the concerns of Faith, by the assistance of Christ, it is then an unerring infallible authority.

Submission to authority thus divinely supported by Christ himself, will effectually secure the unity which he recommended, and for which he so earnestly prayed. Without this submission there can be no unity of faith, no unity with regard to the sacred rites, ceremonies, and worship of Christians; no unity of ecclesiastical discipline and government. Heresy, schism, and innovation would march abroad among Christians, introducing division and confusion into their ranks. Truth and Charity would both be sacrificed. System after system, scheme after scheme, sect after

* See John, x. 16; and xvii. 20. Also Rom. v. 5; 1. Cor. i. 10, and Ephes. iv. 3, &c.

sect, would appear and disappear. And amid the universal confusion of a thousand controversies, the Gospel of Christ would become a mere fable, for the scoff of the infidel, and the contempt of the wicked.

If therefore Christianity be a divine and harmonious system, if the plain teaching of scripture be entitled to credit, unity among Christians is indispensably necessary. If unity be necessary, Christ must have invested his Church with an unerring, infallible authority.

Are we correct in referring to these scripture proofs, as conclusive to demonstrate that the Redeemer invested his Church with an unerring authority in the concerns of divine faith? Protestants think not. They protest against the doctrine that the Church established by Christ, has an unerring authority in matters of faith. They do not believe it. This is one of the negative articles of their faith. But to assert a negative and seek to establish it by a false interpretation of the texts of scripture which teach the affirmative, will scarcely satisfy a rational and impartial inquirer.

Let them make this article of their faith positive, and in place of saying "I deny that Christ left an unerring authority with his Church," let them affirm this: "I believe, as an article of faith, that Christ established a Church and invested it with an *erring, fallible* authority, to which, however, he enjoyed submission."

And, as they only believe what the scriptures plainly teach, let them show one plain text of scripture which sustains this article of their faith. We defy them to do so. And yet it is an article of their faith that *fallibility* is an attribute of the Church of Christ. They shelter the glaring absurdity of their positive doctrines behind sophisms, and come forth with negations to wrestle against the positive faith of Catholics. Let their negations be made affirmations, and then let them prove that Christ intended his Church to lead men into error, superstition and damnable idolatry; that he established a fallible Church; that he wished heresies and schisms; that he desired his kingdom to be divided, his followers to be dissuaded and in continual controversies; that he was willing that any and every man who chose, might usurp the office of preacher, instructor, guide and minister, without any regard to ordination or mission. And let them show plain scripture in support of these affirmations. They cannot do so: and they never undertake it, notwithstanding all their boast about believing only what scripture teaches.

It is something not a little remarkable, that Protestants can make no use whatever of all those plain, strong passages of scripture, which are brought forward to prove the controverted points of Catholic doctrine. They can do nothing with all these to show any of the truths which they profess to discover in the word of God or any of the attributes or prerogatives of their own sectarian Churches. If they quote them at all, it is that they may, by ingenious, strained, and far-sought interpretation, deprive the Catholic Church of the testimony which they furnish her, and succeed, by explanation, construction, and false logic,

to set aside the point of their testimony, they are perfectly satisfied and seem to take for granted that their own heterogeneous assertions are consequently confirmed.

But why do they not bring forward these same plain texts, to show some positive doctrine of their own creeds, to set forth some attribute of their own churches? Why can their Bible-religion make no direct positive and affirmative use of these passages of the written word of God? Can they, from the text, "Thou art Peter: and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it," show that some promise is here made to their Church, and what this promise is, and what is the result thereof in the history of their Church? Can they, from the text, "whose sin, you shall forgive, they are forgiven; whose sins you shall retain they are retained," and from this other, "Whatsoever you shall bind upon earth, shall be bound also in heaven; whatsoever you shall loose upon earth shall be loosed also in heaven," prove that Christ left with their ministry some extraordinary powers? Can they, from the text, "If he will not hear the Church let him be to thee as a heathen and a publican," show the obligation to submit to their Church? And from the text, "This is my body, this is my blood;" "Do this in commemoration of me," can they show the right to give "the flesh and blood" of Christ to be the life of their members, and say, as the Apostle did, "The chalice of Benediction which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? And the bread which we break is it not the partaking of the body of the Lord?"

Can they show their compliance with the injunction of St. James "to anoint the sick with oil?" Can they use these and other plain texts of scripture to set forth their own positive doctrines, in place of trying their ingenuity in controversy against the Catholic Church? They protest, they deny, they oppose—they face these texts as antagonists, they regard them as so many witnesses arrayed to condemn them, and like parties to a process, their chief aim and desire is to invalidate the testimony, to find in it some weak point, some flaw, some ground on which to impeach it and set it aside. But as far as it is direct and positive, they can do nothing with it, and really these texts seem to make no part of those scriptures, upon which they profess to ground their faith. Why, like Luther, do they not expunge them, and pronounce them papistical interpolations? Luther found his novelty, about "faith alone," condemned by the epistle of St. James, and he soon set the testimony aside by expelling this epistle from the canon of scripture; pronouncing it "an epistle of straw." Luther has shown Protestants an easy way to silence the witnesses which come forward to condemn their principles. They treat the texts which positively condemn them, with silence and neglect in all cases, where they are not engaged in protesting against the ancient Church, and undermining her authority and doctrines.

11. Cor. x. 18.

(To be Continued.)