

second; or why he does not go so far as the fourth; or if we interrogate, in the same way, the advocates of the various epochs that have been chosen, we can get no other reply, than that so their judgment leads them to determine. There is no previously acknowledged, guiding principle, to regulate their conclusions. And this, we maintain, is to determine the matter arbitrarily,—not according to the principles of sound reason, or sound religion, but according to fancy. Yet, while this is manifestly a matter of opinion, even with Tractarians themselves, they do not scruple to unchurch all who do not adopt their views precisely.

All the branches of knowledge with which we are acquainted, have some fixed and determinable basis on which they rest. And are we to suppose that religion, which is the highest branch, has no certain foundation, but a foundation which may be greater or less, according to the fancy of different ecclesiastical writers? Would not this be to trifle on a matter on which trifling is most out of place? How much more rational, consistent, honourable to God, and likely to be profitable to man, is the doctrine of the Reformation, that the rule of faith is to be found only, and always, in the word of God itself? Agreeably to this rule, we reject all merely human writings whatever, whether confessions, decrees of Councils, traditions, or the works of learned and pious men, either of this, or of any preceding age. We will have neither the Fathers of the 4th century, nor of the 3d, nor of the 2d, nor of the 1st,—we will not even have the writings of men who were contemporary with the Apostles themselves, nor of men who lived before them,—we reject the writings of all authors, sacred or profane, Jewish or Christian,—we utterly refuse to receive any thing as the rule of faith, except only the writings of those holy men, who

wrote and “spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” And if we are asked to give a reason for so doing, we reply at once, *they were inspired*, and deliver to us only the mind of God, while all others give us their own mind.

2. We charge this rule with being vague, indefinite, and uncertain. If it is desirable to possess certainty, tried certainty on any subject whatever, that subject, above all others, must be *religion*, from which we derive our hope of access into God’s favour, and of everlasting felicity. It is supremely desirable, it is absolutely necessary, to have certainty here, that our hopes may rest on some stable basis, which the winds and the waves shall not be able to overthrow. And here the Gospel of Jesus Christ commends itself to the understanding and the heart, for it presents to us a foundation for our hope which nothing can shake, much less destroy, even the “sure word” and promise of the everlasting Jehovah, “Behold I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried corner-stone, elect, precious; he that believeth shall not make waste.” But contrast with this the uncertainty of the foundation on which Tractarians and Romanists would have us to place our faith, *the unanimous consent of the Fathers*: tradition blended with Scripture. There is, first of all, an uncertainty respecting the extent or duration of the supposed era of the Fathers, some confining it to the two first centuries, as has been already remarked, and others prolonging it to the 3d, 4th, 5th, &c. There is a second uncertainty, respecting the precise period in which many of the Fathers lived; which renders it impossible to determine satisfactorily to what century they belonged; one, for example, is placed, by some judges, in the first century, whom others place in the second; or another is assigned to the fourth, who is brought so far down by other writers,