

“other foundation than this can no man lay,” and, built upon this Rock, the “gates of hell cannot prevail” against the Church.

“And the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” From Oriental records, and from travellers who have made themselves acquainted with Eastern manners and customs, we learn that, in olden time, deliberative councils and judicial courts were held at the gates of towns and cities; which information sheds a flood of light upon this otherwise unintelligible expression. We take it, then, to mean that all the adverse counsels, machinations, conspiracies and assaults of the powers of darkness and destruction, can never prevail against her—that no weapon formed against her shall prosper. He who knows the end from the beginning, who cannot be deceived nor lie, has declared that all the efforts to destroy the Church shall fail;—that when kingdoms and empires shall crumble and decay, and all false systems, whether of Philosophy or Theology, shall disappear, like the “morning cloud and the early dew,” the Church which has Christ as its foundation and keystone, will stand firm as the mountains round about Jerusalem, rising and extending with irresistible force, until the “heathen becomes its inheritance and the uttermost corners of the earth its possession,”—ultimately to form a part of the eternal kingdom of God.

With these few general observations, we now proceed more particularly to illustrate the subject of the text. And

I. We infer its permanence and indestructibility from the suitableness of its doctrines to the wants of our nature, as well as the felt sense that no other system can adequately meet or supply them. The immortal soul has its cravings and wants, and only Christianity can satisfy or supply them. There is its Creator, God, its all-wise and over-ruling Providence, its salvation for the guilty, its help for the weak, its healing for the sick, its sight for the blind, its riches for the poor in spirit, its comfort for the mourner, its home for the wandering outcast, and its “building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens,” for the “pilgrim and stranger,” who desire the “better country.” So long as man retains the power of reflection, while exposed to danger and subjected to afflictions, which his own weakness can neither encounter nor remove; while the conscience accuses, or death inspires terror; while he retains a sense of the dignity of his nature as a reasonable and responsible being;—thus long will all these gospel appeals, these voices of Christianity have power, some to inspire fear and trembling, and others to allure with consolation and hope. They are voices that can never lose their power, truths that can never become antiquated. They have been framed and revealed by Him who knows man’s nature and all the circumstances of his lot, and having been adapted by Him, in His unerring Wisdom, to their

exigencies, must ever remain new and suitable, through all succeeding generations, until the consummation of all things.

It may be, and has been, that, as in the case of an individual, so in that of a community, a time may be when the cares of the world or the feverish excitement of passion may render insensible to the claims of Christianity, so that for a time the Church may wane, and be confined to the mountain fastnesses, to the martyr’s cave, to retired valleys among lowly shepherds, or to weeping widows in their solitary chambers. But it will not become extinct.

Man *must* have a religion, human nature cannot live without it: and can the sceptic, the atheist or the infidel tell of a system better adapted to meet and satisfy the cry and craving of the immortal soul, than Christianity? Philosophy has been but speculating itself into thicker darkness, and other systems passing into forgetfulness, since Christianity revealed and proved its suitableness to human wants. We argue, therefore, that the Church whose system is Christianity cannot be prevailed against, even by the “gates of hell.”

II. The favour and promises of God afford us security that “the gates of hell will not prevail” against the Church.

The “ways and thoughts” of God not only transcend, but widely differ from, man’s “thoughts and ways.” Much of what would attract man’s attention, and call forth his unqualified admiration, looked upon by God, would be viewed by Him with anything but favourable or cherishing regard. Thrones dazzling with their splendour, the boast of millions, yet established in wickedness and idolatry, whose corner-stone is injustice and cruelty, can only be the objects of His abhorrence, and for the destruction of which He must be preparing the thunderbolts of His wrath. In contemplating the kingdoms and institutions of this earth, there is one feature in connection with them to which He cannot be indifferent. He marks whether or not they acknowledge Him as Supreme, and frame their laws by His revealed will; and according as He is acknowledged or ignored, will He smile or frown upon them, and according as they *afford* or *withhold* shelter from His Church, will He enrich with His favour, or blight with curse. In the course of eternity the Church was established, and for her ransom God gave His only-begotten and well-beloved Son to death. What need there be, then, for an institution that is built on so sure and so stable a foundation and enjoying such favourable auspices? Shall not the arm of the Almighty protect her, and His favour encompass her as a shield? Will He not be a wall of fire around, and the glory in the midst of her?

And can God’s love change? Hear His own assuring promise: ‘Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb?’ Ye