

interpret the Scriptures for themselves without an infallible guidance, their interpretations will necessarily vary in proportion to the different degrees of their capacity or attention. Their interpretation can at best be but probable; and a probable conclusion can never be admitted as the ground of a divine faith. It will not be at all necessary to discuss accurately at large the arguments founded on the passages of Scripture before adduced. Suffice it to observe, that the links which compose the chain of the argument are numerous, and that it would not be easy to prove any one of them to the satisfaction of an unprejudiced inquirer. In that argument it is assumed for granted that St. Peter was invested with a supremacy over the rest of the apostles; that the keys were *exclusively* given to him; that his faith was more indefectible than that of his brethren; that he exercised the episcopal office at Rome; and that he devolved his peculiar power and prerogatives on his successors in that sacred office. Every one of these arbitrary assumptions is destitute of a shadow of truth, either from Scripture or antiquity. That Peter was *ever* at Rome we have no evidence but vague and uncertain tradition; that he exercised the episcopal functions there is still more uncertain, or rather extremely improbable, as it is neither insinuated in Scripture nor very consistent with his higher character and functions. But supposing both these points were conceded, what evidence have we of that devolution of his power and prerogatives on his successors on which the authority assumed by the bishop of Rome entirely rests? From the language of Scripture and the testimony of antiquity, there is much more reason for affirming that James the Less was bishop of the Church of Jerusalem, than that Peter sustained that office at Rome; and by a parity of reason, his successors must be supposed to

have inherited his powers and his infallibility; and the rather, since the church at Jerusalem was the mother of all other churches, planted, not by one, but by all the apostles, often dignified by their united presence,—a church on which the redundance of spiritual gifts was first poured, and consecrated by the blood of the first martyr. If, in opposition to this, we are reminded that the succeeding bishops of Jerusalem derived from St. James the rights attached to the episcopal function, but not his personal prerogatives and immunities as an apostle,—this very distinction applies precisely to the successors of St. Peter.

This may suffice to show the extreme frivolity and levity of the proofs adduced from Scripture in support of the claim of papal or Catholic infallibility. But, admitting the arguments derived from this quarter were much more cogent than they are, it is evident that they are entirely deduced from the interpretation of certain passages of Scripture, and consequently depend on the correctness of that interpretation. Is this interpretation, I would ask, to be taken for granted, or is it to be proved and sustained by the principles of sound criticism? Are we to take the mere affirmation of the Church of Rome on this subject, and at once admit that the inference she deduces from these passages is just, because she asserts it to be so? This is impossible, because this would be to acknowledge her infallibility, which is the very point to be proved. We are inquiring after the *proofs* of her infallibility: she refers us for satisfaction to the passages of Scripture before adduced. Her supposed infallibility can afford no sort of security for her correct interpretation of these passages, because her object in urging these passages is to prove her infallibility. To say that she has put a right construction on these texts because