

J. J. Patton

THE CHRISTIAN SENTINEL.

I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved.—Hab. ii. 1.

Rev. A. H. BURWELL, Editor.]

THREE RIVERS, FRIDAY, 4th MARCH 1831.

[Vol. I.—No. 27.]

CAPTAIN GORDAN ON ROMANISM.

IN giving the following to our readers, we are conscious of treading on delicate, though we believe not on forbidden, ground. There are Roman Catholics among our subscribers. We owe them personal courtesy, and wish not to offend against it. But we also owe them another debt—the debt of argument and sound reason on matters which the Church of Rome acknowledges as fair subjects of critical discussion, by herself discussing them against Protestants. She thus in fact admits the right of private judgment, *on evidence*, the same as in a Court of Law; and in effect offers to abide by its decisions, when made in accordance with the rules of evidence and proper investigation. This being the case, no Roman Catholic need be afraid to scrutinize by fact, evidence, and fair reasoning every article of his faith, because his Church, by consenting to argue on it in any case, sets him the example. We therefore beg our Roman Catholic readers to look over the following article and the notes appended, with a willingness to be swayed by the authority of evidence and fair reasoning; and if any thing is advanced that is illogical, or would be unfair in treating of any matter of fact, let it not be regarded.

It would be irrelevant—nay untrue—to disclaim a wish to proselyte. We wish it sincerely—but we wish it done by fair means, and the rational conviction of the mind. We would make converts, if possible, by mathematical demonstration,—and then retain them by the pure love of truth. But if any cannot be won in this way, by rational conviction, and in the integrity of their hearts, we have no more to say.—EDITOR.

Mr. Editor,

Please to insert the following Speech spoken at a Reformation Society meeting in England and oblige,

Your's faithfully,

A REFORMER.

Mr. Gordon then rose, and stated the question at issue between the Roman Catholic and reformed Churches. Infallibility, he said, must be kept perfectly distinct from authority, from perpetuity, from visibility. Every Church, whether Christian or otherwise, possessed authority, therefore authority was not the question at issue. It would be equally necessary to exclude the consideration of perpetuity and visibility, as Protestants not only admit, but assert that the gates of hell shall never prevail against the Church of Christ. This distinction, he said, was the more necessary, as the advocate of the Church of Rome is constantly in the habit of employing the texts which treat of perpetuity and visibility to support infallibility. The first argument, he said, which Roman Catholics employ in support of the infallibility of the Church of Rome is presumptive. God, they say, could not have left His church under the guidance of fallible instruction, for then there could be no certainty in matters of faith. The result of private judgment is difference of opinion, but difference of opinion, in matters of faith, is incompatible with unity of belief, and if unity of belief be essential in the concerns of our salvation, there must be an infallible guide to teach it. In other words, infallibility is necessary, and therefore infallibility must exist. To this assumption of the necessity of infallibility, said Mr. G., the answer is obvious. If it be necessary now, it was always necessary, since the weakness of human judgment, and the depravity of human nature have been the same since the fall of Adam. But infallibility did not always

exist,* and therefore we deny that it is now necessary. The next point, he said, in the examination of the subject, was the mode of proof. Roman Catholics, in the attempt to prove the infallibility of their Church, refer us to certain texts of Scripture, but Scripture having no authority, until it receives it from the Church of Rome, the texts in question, as unauthoritative testimony cannot

* The reason for the necessity of infallibility, if any there be, must be the same as that for the existence of the Church of God. The salvation of sinners by the Church is God's object in building the Church, or in giving men a method of serving him acceptably. It cannot be denied that the Church has existed from the days of Adam, and has continually been an instrument of salvation in God's hand for the benefit of true worshippers according to his revealed will. It was so from Adam to Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Christ. But the object of the Church, since Christ came in regard to its members is precisely the same as it was before him in regard to its members then; namely, their salvation. Before his Advent, they believed in a Saviour to come; since then, they believe in one come; by whom alone, in strictness of speech, salvation has ever been found: the difference has been merely in the mode of access to his merits. As to perpetuity, the Church has always been infallible, even from the expulsion of Adam from Paradise, and always will be so: and she has always had free access to the word of God as to a sure guide in matters of required obedience. Now judging from the naked premises themselves, from the wants and necessities of believers at all times; from the circumstance that the soul of a believer was as precious in the sight of God before Christ came as since, we are prepared to regard infallibility or exemption from liability to error quite as necessary for the Church from Adam to Christ as at this day. Was not an infallible interpreter of God's word as necessary for the assurance of a pious Jew as it is for a Christian? yet has ever that claim been made for any but the Church of Rome, and that in comparatively modern times? The analogy of the Old Testament furnishes no presumptive evidences for the necessity of the claimed infallibility.

A succession of infallible interpreters would be a perpetual miracle; for nothing short of a continual miraculous interposition, that is, inspiration in its proper sense, could answer the purpose of such a standing court of appeal for the whole world. But as all who, in the New Testament, claimed to be inspired encountered the unyielding claim of the people on them for miraculous attestations addressed to the outward senses, it is as reasonable that the infallibles of the Church of Rome should answer the demand by raising the dead, &c., as it was for the Apostles. The successors of St. Peter have not certainly been acquiring continual accessions to their dignity, so as to become exempt from the claims of scrutiny to which he ever manifested the utmost readiness to submit "in all humility." But the identical spot of the residence of this infallibility should be as conspicuous also as the sun in heaven; and the distinctness of its manifestations should be on an equality with its magnitude and importance. It should be able to silence contradiction with a flash of lightning and a voice of thunder, instead of resorting to the suspicious method of endless and intricate and variable argumentation.

Ask any Romish ecclesiastic if he is infallible, and he will answer no. Ask the Pope himself, and what answer will he give? If he should reply in the affirmative, and he were again asked for a decision on some intricate question, one for instance that he never before heard proposed, would he give an oracular and instantaneous infallible response, or would he consult written authorities? If he is under the necessity of consulting authorities, who that has his information and judgment may not claim his infallibility? But if he consult authority, he is only exercising his own private judgment on it, the same as any other person, and not giving an infallible decision. The decision should be his own, not that of another. Ask again the individual members of an infallible Council if they are separately infallible individuals, and they must answer no. For if they were, why did they assemble as ignorant individuals for the purpose of discovering truth in free debate, and separating it from error? Was not each one as near possessing infallibility before they met,