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**BALTIMORE LITERARY**

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AND

**RELIGIOUS MAGAZINE,**

**For 1837.**

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CONDUCTED BY  
**ROBERT J. BRECKINRIDGE,**  
AND  
**ANDREW B. CROSS.**

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"Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ." Col. ii. 8.

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**VOL. III.**

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*M.D.*

# INDEX TO THE VOLUME.

## A.

Abduction of Eliza Burns,	345, 519, 549
Abolitionism in the feminine gender,	411
Agnus Deis,	233
Anathema, form of	524
Antichrist, the Pope	193
Antiq'ty of the religion of Protestants,	201
Assembly, Presbyterian of 1837,	281, 304
310, 312, 313, 360, 391,	454
Assurance, Christian	433
Anecdotes,	
Two little boys and their bible,	41
Settling accounts,	48
John Randolph,	ib
Indian eating a Popish God,	173
Trial of a Priest's faith,	179
Two sins for a confession,	181
Confessing to a Stump,	182
Of Napoleon,	13
Admitting Pilgrim's Pro-	
gress in Italy,	325

## B.

Bellarmino quoted,	176
Bible doctrine of Slavery,	418, 476
Bishops full vs Bishops empty,	466
Body, This is my	34
Breckinridge's Discourse on the } formation and development of } the American Mind,	482
Brunswick, the Duke of—50th-reason,	35
Bulls—Pope Pius VII. vs Bible } Societies,	44, 93
Unigenitus, by Clement XI.	123
Pius VII. Excom. of Buonaparte,	185
Innocent XI. on Edict of Nantz,	233
Bishop of New York vs. free } discussion,	46
Buonaparte Excommunicated,	185
Burns Eliza, case of	345, 519, 549

## C.

Calvin, Character of	107
Cardinals, Origin of	54
Duties,	55
how created,	56
purple dress of	ib
Extract from their let- } ter to Paul III. see note. }	57
Canon Laws,	
Women cannot bear witness,	33
Oaths vs. the Church are } perjuries,	33
Christians, Sufferings of Early	135, 136
Columbus, Christopher	151
Commons, a night in the House of	292
Communion in one kind,	137
Convent, Carmelite scream in	101
Confession, meaning of	180

Confession uncertainty of	180
Congregation of the Index,	240
Council, Roman, at Baltimore,	253
" of the Pope,	54

## D.

Decrees of Trent on Images, Saints, } Relics,	87
" " Communion in } one kind,	132
" " Extreme unction,	50
" " Mass,	175
Deluol, Priest as a Controvertialist,	509
Destitution in Baltimore,	276
Destroying Christ in the Mass,	174
Division of the Presbyterian Church,	313
Documentary History of the Assem- bly of 1837,	312, 360, 391, 454

## E.

Edict of Nantz revoked,	233
Education Society, American,	454
" in Ireland,	261
English Universities, Reform pro- } posed in	331
Enupnion,	182
Errors in Doctrine,	512
Eucharist, real presence in the	36
Exposition of Rom. IX. 1—3	529

## F.

Finale of the case of Eliza Burns,	519
Fontainebleau, Palace of	565
Edict of	235
Fundamental doc. of Christianity,	448, 542

## G.

Geneva,	104-5
Green, Robert A. case of	51

## H.

Hale, Sir Matthew, on keeping } the Sabbath,	74
Hazard of Salvation in Church of Rome,	1
Hogan Excommunicated,	524
Holy See, Tribunals of the	121

## I. J.

Idolatry, British in India,	376
Immorality of Popes,	352
Index, Congregation of	240
Prohibitory, Rules of	50
Intercession, Nature of Christ's	166
Justification, Essays on 355, 404, 514,	557

Southern Works Co 12 May 1943

<b>K.</b>		Prohibitory Index, Rules of, - - - 40
Kerney and Gildea, Priests - - -	49	Propagandism, Catholic in the U. S. 209
<b>L.</b>		Protestants, Antiq'y of their religion, 201
<b>Letters,</b>		"    unlearned, directions to 381
To W. G. Reed, Esq. - - -	97	Protestantism and Popery contrasted, 141
Irish Bps. vs. Bible societies, 141		Principal reason for depriving the } 167
Jacob Sporn to La Chaise, 201		laity of the cup, } 167
Mollard Lefevre, - - -	333	Præface, Real in the Eucharist, 37
Michael Crotty to Dr. Murray, - - - 326, 370, 427.		
From Dr. Junkin, - - -	447	
Sir M. Hale to his children, 74		
Pope Innocent XI. - - -	235	
Life of Whitfield, - - -	26	
Loss of Friends, - - -	31	
Literary History of the Papal } 441		
controversy, } 441		
<b>M.</b>		
Memoranda of Foreign Travel, by		
Robert J. Breckinridge, 12, 58, 104		
150, 214, 240, 322, 337, 385. (See		
<i>the contents on each of these pages.</i>		
Memorial to the Assembly of 1837, 281		
Missionary Society, American Home 454		
Moral Government of God, 448, 552		
Morality of the Romish Church, 351		
Morrison, Rev. Geo. Obituary of 230		
Man, Souls of - - -	184	
Matchett, Statement of - - -	549	
<b>O.</b>		
Oath of every Papist, - - -	33	
Oaths vs. the Church, Perjuries, 33		
<b>P.</b>		
Papal Domination in Spain, - - -	409	
Superstition propagated by } 552		
our public money, } 552		
Penance, - - -	423	
Plan of Union, - - -	390	
Popery, Reasons for renouncing 333		
Pope and his Council, - - -	54	
Popish Mass, can a Protestant with } 171		
a safe conscience be present at } 171		
Population, Statistics of - - -	526	
Priest confounded, - - -	179	
Preaching of Bishop England, - - -	253	
<b>R.</b>		
Relics, - - -	86, 433	
" Catalogue of - - -	89, 137	
Rivet on Antichrist, - - -	193	
Rese Bishop, of Detroit, - - -	553	
Religious Excitement, - - -	554	
<b>S.</b>		
Sabbath, Sir M. Hale on - - -	74	
" Breaking of - - -	142	
Sacrificing of Christ afresh; 175, 6, 7, 8,		
Salvation Hazardous in Ch. of Rome, 1		
Scotland, State of Popery in - - -	543	
Sermons, by		
Dr. Tillotson, - - -	1	
Dr. Owen, - - -	145	
Dr. Dickey, - - -	291	
Dr. Miller, - - -	433	
Sins Venial, Difficulty of knowing 180		
Sol Lunar Influence, - - -	80	
Sulpicius Severus, quoted, - - -	136	
Synods, Four separated - - -	391	
" Few facts about one of them, 310		
<b>T.</b>		
Tacitus quoted, - - -	125	
Trent, see Decrees of		
Tribunals of the Holy See, - - -	121	
Theban Cebe, Picture of - - -	535	
Tiernan, note of - - -	547	
<b>U.</b>		
Unigenitus, Bull - - -	128	
Union, Plan of Abrogated, - - -	360	
<b>W.</b>		
Whitfield, Life of - - -	26	
Waldenses of the Cotienn Alps, 166		

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CHRISTIAN ASSURANCE.

*A Sermon by Samuel Miller D. D.—Princeton, New-Jersey.*

II. TIMOTHY I. 12.—Nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed; and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.

THE trials of the pious, in all ages, have been made productive of great and lasting benefits both to themselves and others—perhaps we may say, it is generally under the pressure of adversity that grace is found with the brightest lustre. It is generally in the vale of affliction that believers are most conversant with God, and experience the largest share of the *light of his countenance*, and the *joys of his salvation*. And it is commonly in seasons like this, that they not only enjoy most comfort themselves, but are also enabled to display to those around them the power of religion to the praise of the glory of divine grace. Hence the illustrious reformer *Luther*, was accustomed to speak of *afflictions* as among the things which were necessary to the training of a minister of the gospel, and to fit him to be a guide and a comforter to others.

The pious, the heavenly-minded *Paul* was a constantly and deeply afflicted man. The sufferings which he underwent for the sake of the gospel were many and great. It might be almost literally said, that from the hour of his conversion to the hour of his death, some of the heaviest trials constantly awaited him:—cold, hunger, neglect, stripes, imprisonments, ship-wrecks—what a catalogue of sufferings! Indeed this was so uniformly his lot, that, when he was going up to *Jerusalem* on a certain occasion, he told the Elders of *Ephesus*, that he did not know what was about to befall him there; *save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying, that bonds and afflictions abide me.* When he penned the words of our text, he was confined in a prison at *Rome*, and expected in a little while to be called, as we have reason to believe he actually was, to lay down his life for the faith. But in these trying circumstances, he speaks the heroic language of our text:—*Nevertheless, I am not*

*ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.*

My dear friends, the assured confidence in his Saviour which the apostle *Paul* here expresses was not confined to the early ages of the church—It was not an appendage to his office as an apostle; but a part of his experience as a humble follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is a confidence which lies equally open to us. We have reason to believe, indeed, that such assured confidence was more common in the days of the apostles, and for some time afterwards, than at the present day. But probably the chief reason of this was, that the piety of that period was of a higher order than is prevalent now. But is there any necessity that this should be the case? Certainly not. We have the same gospel; the same promises, the same power of the Holy Spirit that blessed the church in those early days. It is a confidence, then, to which we may and ought all of us to aspire. But what is this confidence? Let us inquire a little into its NATURE—the FOUNDATION on which it rests;—and its beneficial effects.—And may he who alone can bless his own word, make our meditations on this interesting subject truly profitable to us all!

I. Let us begin with examining, for a moment, the *nature of this confidence*. This inquiry is the more important, because there are those who deny that any such confidence as the apostle here expresses, can now be expected or enjoyed. They imagine that it was a blessing confined to the primitive church; to the days of miracle, and of extraordinary communication. They suppose, indeed, that believers may now cherish a trembling hope that the Saviour is theirs, and that they shall live and reign with him forever. But that they can ever be *assured* of this; that they can even venture to say that they *know it*, as the apostle does, they utterly deny, nay, some are even disposed to deride this assurance, whenever, it is claimed, as the offspring of either spiritual pride, or fanatical delusion. But, my dear brethren, this is manifestly an error. Is it pride to believe in God? Is it arrogance or presumption to be ready to trust his word,—to be assured that he will really accomplish what he has promised? No, brethren, it is no pride; it is no arrogance: it is only embracing and honoring Jehovah's promise.

Accordingly, we find this assurance cherished, in the highest degree, by the most humble, devoted and spiritual believers. We find holy *Job*; the devout *Psalmist*; the apostle *Paul*, and many others, speaking repeatedly and strongly in the confident language of our text; declaring that they *know* they are the children of God, and that a crown of glory is laid up for them. And more than this, we are solemnly exhorted in that blessed volume which is given us as *a light unto our feet, and a lamp unto our path*, in every age;—we are solemnly exhorted and enjoined to seek after this assurance, and to maintain it with sacred care. *Give all diligence to make your calling and election sure*,—and again, *give all diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end*.

This blessed assurance of our personal interest in the Saviour, is by no means, indeed, essential to saving faith, or to the Christian character. In other words, a person may be a sincere believer in

Christ; a real practical Christian; and of course, in a state of salvation, and yet not be able, with confidence, to adopt the language of our text. To *be* a Christian is one thing:—to *know* that we are such,—that is, that we *have* believed in Christ, and are united to him, as the branch is united to the vine, is another. And although the latter is highly desirable, and ought to be earnestly sought after by all; yet it is not actually attained by every Christian; nor is it equally enjoyed at all times alike by those who have attained it. Saving faith is an expression which denotes that exercise of mind by which we receive and rest upon Jesus Christ alone for Salvation. and it always, I apprehend, involves an appropriating act;—in other words, in all cases, it implies not only a firm, practical belief that Christ is a divine and all sufficient Saviour, but also an humble, practical reliance upon him as the hope and the *only* hope of the soul. But the assurance of our personal interest in him, is a firm persuasion, derived from inspecting the word of God in our hearts, and from the *witness of the Holy Spirit with our spirits* that we are the children of God by a holy regeneration and a gracious adoption, and shall finally be saved.

The assured confidence of which we speak, is a very different thing from that blind, superstitious confidence which takes for granted without inquiry, that all is right, and that salvation is certain. Genuine Christian assurance is enlightened. It is always preceded by serious and honest self-examination. It rests on evidence and on evidence derived from the Holy Scriptures. It delights, and it much abounds in comparing its evidences with the word of God: and it cherishes a holy jealousy over itself. It is also a very different thing from that Antinomian confidence which professes to be a stranger to all doubts and fears, while the life is careless or corrupt. The assurance which is genuine is as inseparably connected with the love of holiness as it is with meekness and humility. *He that hath this hope in him purifieth himself even as he is pure.*

It is common on this subject, and I think correct, to distinguish between the *assurance of faith*, and the *assurance of hope*. The *assurance of faith* is a firm persuasion of the reality and glory of spiritual objects.—It is a firm, assured persuasion that the gospel, the Saviour whom it proclaims, and its precious promises, have all that reality and glory which the holy Scriptures ascribe to them. But the *assurance of hope* goes further, and is confidently persuaded of a *personal interest* in this Saviour, and in these promises. It is an assured hope that we shall be found in Christ and shall live and reign with him forever. In short, the assurance of faith is an assurance that Christ is, in fact, an almighty, an all sufficient, and most precious Saviour. The assurance of hope, is a firm, unwavering confidence that he is our Saviour, and will be ours forever.

The former of these may be enjoyed without the latter; and is, indeed, a very common attainment among real Christians. The latter is not so common; is never engaged without the former; and wherever it exists, assumes the former as its unailing basis.

If you ask me, whether it is the *assurance of faith*, or the *assurance of hope* which the apostle here expresses? I answer, it is *both* most distinctly combined. A firm persuasion of the reality

and glory and blessedness of the great foundation of hope, is explicitly mentioned as the basis on which all his confidence of personal salvation rested.—

Such brethren, is the assured confidence which the apostle here expresses. It is an humble, enlightened persuasion that the Saviour and his salvation are great realities; and that they are ours:—a persuasion flowing from scriptural evidence, that we possess the marks of Christian sanctification:—a persuasion which commonly is, and always *ought* to be *proportioned* to that evidence,—a persuasion which, according to its strength, is always accompanied with a holy temper, and a holy practice. But, II. What was the *ground* on which this confidence of the apostle rested, and on which our confidence *ought* to rest, and *must* rest if it be genuine.

One of the most illustrious literary characters of the eighteenth century, the celebrated *Dr. Johnson*, was accustomed strongly to reject the claim of Christian assurance, as an attainment beyond the reach of Christians at the present day. He maintained that no man was warranted in meeting death with entire confidence; “for how,” said he, “can any man be *certain* that he has completely fulfilled the conditions of acceptance with God?” Alas! my dear brethren if our confidence toward God had no other ground to rest upon, than a consciousness of having completely “fulfilled the conditions” according to the apparent understanding of this respected writer, “of our acceptance with God,” we might well sit down in despair. And we might well pronounce the confidence of the venerable apostle before us—who, with one breath confessed himself to be a miserable sinner, and with the next, expressed a strong and assured hope of divine acceptance;—we might well pronounce such confidence to be inconsistent and vain.

But, forever blessed be a God of infinite mercy! there is a firmer and a safer ground of confidence than any thing in ourselves can furnish. There is a better righteousness than our own provided, in the atoning sacrifice and perfect obedience of our great substitute and Redeemer. On this ground it is plain that the penitent and believing sinner—nay, even the chief of sinners, who is deeply conscious that he has not complied with the demands of God’s righteous law, nay, who is conscious that he has broken it in ten thousand aggravated instances:—yet if he believe and embrace the gospel of Christ; if he humbly receive and rest on the Saviour for salvation;—on that precious blood which cleanseth from all sin, and if he be conscious that he *has* thus received and rested upon him, and is doing it;—even *he* unworthy as he feels himself to be—utterly unworthy as he must and certainly will feel himself to be,—may join with the apostle in saying, *I know in whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.*

As a confirmation of these remarks, let us look, for a moment, at the ground of the apostle’s confidence. Here we find that great Christian champion, the apostle *Paul*, at the close of a long, laborious, and exemplary life, giving an account, to a dear and intimate young friend, of the hope that was in him. Perhaps no man had ever more reason than *Paul*, to found his hopes on his own attain-

ments and performances. He had been favoured far beyond most of the children of men by the abundance both of his gifts and graces. He had had extraordinary revelations made to him. He had been *caught up to the third heavens, and there heard unspeakable words which it was not lawful for a man to utter.*

His services, too, in the cause of Christ had been pre-eminent. He had *laboured more abundantly than all the rest of the apostles.* He had preached the gospel, and gathered churches through a very large part of the Roman Empire. He had, perhaps; been the means of converting more souls to the knowledge and love of the truth, than any other man that ever preached the gospel. I repeat it—perhaps no man had ever more reason than *Paul* to found his hopes on his own attainments and performances, and yet, when this man so illustrious for his gifts and graces and labours, comes to speak of the ground of his hope toward God, he says not one word of any of these things, or of any meritorious performance of his own; but rests his whole confidence on that grand foundation which was common to him with all believers, *I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.*

As if he had said—“Amidst all my sufferings and infirmities, I am neither intimidated nor discouraged. I have a confidence towards God which raises me above them all. My confidence, however, is founded, not on any qualification or attainment which I find in myself; for I am a poor, polluted, miserable sinner; but on the atoning sacrifice and perfect righteousness of my blessed Saviour. I know him, I know that in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. I know that he is *able and willing to save unto the uttermost all that come unto God through him*—I know that he has declared, that *whomsoever cometh unto him he will in no wise cast out.* I am conscious of having humbly complied with this invitation, I am conscious of having embraced him as my Saviour, and of having committed my soul, with all its precious interests, into his hands—the *Holy Spirit witnesseth with my spirit* that he is my only hope and trust. I know that *my Beloved is mine, and that I am his.* Here, therefore, I rest—assured that he is able to keep, and that he will keep, that which I have committed to him. To this as to an *anchor of the soul*, in prosperity and adversity, in sorrow and in joy, I cleave, and *rejoice in hope of the glory of God.*”

And on the same ground may every real Christian, whose faith is strong, and whose evidences of Christian character are bright; who is conscious that he has embraced, and is resting on the Saviour;—on the same ground may he cherish the same blessed confidence which the apostle here expresses. Though he may be humbled under a sense of multiplied transgressions; though he may feel that he deserves to die; and that if a holy God should mark iniquities against him, he could never stand:—though he may feel that his heart is a fountain of iniquity, which, if left to itself, must be his destruction; yet if, like the apostle, he “knows Christ;” if the Saviour has been *revealed in him the hope of glory*; if he has cordially repented of all his sins, and has been enabled sincerely to receive and rest on Christ as his righteousness and strength; and if he be assured—



ly conscious that he has, by faith, committed all his most precious interests into his hands;—why may he not adopt;—nay, what can prevent him from adopting the language of the apostle? What can prevent him from *rejoicing in the Lord and joying in the God of his salvation*? What can prevent him from adopting the triumphant language of the same apostle on another occasion—*who shall separate me from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall ever be able to separate me from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus my Lord.* Romans, viii. 35—39.

III. But what are the *benefits* of this assurance? I know that these benefits are seriously doubted by many. Is not this plenary confidence of our good estate, some will ask—adapted to make those who enjoy it proud, arrogant and presumptuous? Nay is not, the persuasion, when firmly fixed in the mind of any man, that he is in a state of grace and salvation, and that his eternal happiness is secure, calculated to make him relax in spiritual diligence, and even to indulge in licentiousness of life? I answer by asking in my turn, was this assurance ever enjoyed, by any man, in a higher degree than by the apostle *Paul*? But did it make *him* proud and presumptuous? Did it make *Paul* careless or licentious in his practice? No, it is notorious that its influence in him was directly the reverse: It was connected with humble diligence and universal holiness.—As his assurance increased, his sanctification, in the same proportion, gained strength. It raised him above the world; above the fear of man; above the fear of death. It supported him in his trials; it sweetened his labours; it enabled him to rejoice even in tribulation; nay, amidst all that was adapted to discourage, to terrify, and to depress, it enabled him to *rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.*

And such is the native influence of this assurance, when it is genuine, in all ages. I know that a false and presumptuous confidence is mischievous in its effects.—I know that those who are building their hopes on vain dreams of self-righteousness who say, *peace, peace, when there is no peace*, are always puffed up with spiritual pride, and are apt to be negligent of those very works on which they found their confidence, for, of all persons in the world, those who ascribe most merit to their own works, have the fewest of them to show. But that scriptural assurance which is founded on the finished work of an all sufficient Saviour; which looks forward to a holy heaven as its dwelling place and its home; and which cannot legitimately exist but with growing evidence of sanctification.—such an assurance is demonstrably fitted to animate in duty; to support under trials; to quicken obedience; and to bring down into the soul more of the spirit as well as more of the enjoyment of heaven.

And, accordingly, how often have we seen this blessed assurance of hope, supporting the weak; comforting the feeble minded; displaying its consoling power in the beggar's cottage; in the prison-

er's dungeon; amidst the chains of slavery; under the weakness and pain of disease? and above all, on the bed of death. Nay, how often has it borne the martyr above the fear of death in its most terrifying forms, and enabled him to take up songs of praise even in the midst of the flames!

And well may the assured Christian feel and act thus. When he feels confident that the great interest is secured, how or why should he be deeply anxious about any thing else? What matter is it to *him*, whether he is full or hungry; whether he abounds or suffers need; whether he is loaded with honours, or neglected and forgotten;—nay, whether he suffers a few hours torture or not, when he can, with unwavering confidence call his own *an incorruptible crown—an undefiled inheritance an exceeding and eternal weight of glory?*

The view of this subject which has been given suggests a variety of important lessons. To some of them allow me, before I close, to request your attention. And, 1st. We learn, from what has been said, *the infinite importance of our entertaining just thoughts of Christ.* Some have supposed that it is a matter of comparatively small moment what opinions we entertain concerning the person and character of the blessed Redeemer, whether we consider him as a mere man; or as the most exalted of all creatures; or as Jehovah equal with the Father;—are questions as they imagine, of small moment indeed as scarcely worth the trouble of inquiry or of controversy. And so they think of the great question concerning his atonement, and his imputed righteousness as all speculative matters, of little practical importance. But, my dear brethren, can it be that the question whether my Saviour, to whom I commit my soul, and all my most precious interests, for time and eternity, is a mere man like myself or the true God? Can it be, that the question, whether the captain of salvation, who has promised to *give eternal life to as many as are given him*, is almighty, or a mere feeble creature? Can it be, that the question, whether I am to be justified by my own righteousness, or solely by the atoning blood, and perfect righteousness of a divine Redeemer, is a question of mere speculative indifference? No, brethren the inspired man who penned the words of our text thought otherwise. To “know Christ” as an all sufficient Saviour, was, in his view; all in all, and, O, my friends, if we ever enjoy the comforts of a genuine assurance similar to that which *Paul* enjoyed, it must be connected with a similar estimate of Christ, and rest upon the same precious foundation. Men may, indeed, be calm and tranquil in resting on a Socinian Saviour; but it is the calmness of delusion; it is the tranquillity of death. No, my dear friends, *other foundation can no man lay than that is laid which is Jesus Christ.* 1 Corinthians iii. 11.

2. From what has been said, we learn, in *what manner the happy assurance of which we have been speaking, is to be sought, and also how it is to be maintained after being once enjoyed.* We are to seek this assurance, my friends, not by extraordinary revelations; not by mysterious impulses; not by visions or voices from heaven; but by the ordinary means of God's appointment:—by serious and impartial self-examination; by humble, constant, persevering.

prayer; by searching the Scriptures with a particular view to learning from them our own character; by direct views of the blessed Redeemer's character, sufferings and obedience as the only foundation of hope; and by studying to maintain a holy walk with God, and daily to grow in grace. How was it, my beloved friends, that the apostle *Paul*, and other primitive Christians, were able to decide with so much confidence that Christ and his great salvation were theirs? How did they *know* it, as they say with so much frequency and decision they did? Hear their own language. *We know that we are of God, because we love God and keep his commandments: and again; we know that he abideth in us by the spirit which he hath given us.* And again; *We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.* And again; *In this the children of God are manifest, he that doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.* Are there any, then, now feeble, languid and doubting in regard to their good estate; ready to ask, how shall we gain assurance? I answer—get more religion. Strive to live nearer to God.—Be more conversant with the Bible, and the throne of grace—pray without ceasing, for more of the spirit of Christ. For, rely upon it, my dear friends, all that assurance which does not flow from *growing evidence of sanctification* is unscriptural and vain.

3. We may see from what has been said that it is *very possible for some who ought to have the comfort of assurance, to deny themselves that comfort.* Some have, no doubt, had all their spiritual hopes clouded by *bodily disease.* They have been so much under the influence of nervous or hypocondriacal disorders as to give a melancholly cast to all their mental exercises. There are others who enjoy not the comfort of assurance from an entire missapprehension of the nature of that evidence on which assurance ought to rest. They seem to think, that there must be some voice; some light from Heaven; some sensible impulse, something, in short, addressed to the external senses, and thus banishing all doubt. But, nothing of this kind is taught in Scripture. Doubting, trembling soul! are you satisfied that you are sincerely and habitually resting on the merits of the Saviour as your only hope? Are you conscious of unfeigned love to him? Are you conscious that his cause and kingdom are dear to you "above your chief joy?" Are you certain that sin is your grief and your burden; and that it is your unfeigned desire to be delivered from its pollution as well as from its guilt? Can you say, that you have no doubt of any of these things? Then you ought to have no doubt that Christ and his salvation are yours, and will be yours forever.

4. But are there not some who, instead of being able to adopt the language of our text;—instead of *knowing* that "they are of God"—have rather reason to conclude with a confidence amounting to a dreadful assurance, that they are still *aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenant of promise.* They are conscious, perhaps, that they believe in the reality of religion, and that they respect it; but they are conscious, at the same time, that they are strangers to its sanctifying and consoling power. To such, if there be any of this character present, I would faithfully and affect-

tionately speak My dear fellow mortals! if the conviction that this is your situation presses upon your minds, reject it not, turn not away from it, but dark and awful as the conclusion is, look at it often, solemnly, and with earnest crying to God for mercy. Recollect the consequence of living and dying in this state. Remember those tremendous words of our Saviour—if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins. And, O my friends, what is it to die *in your sins*? It is to die with all your sins unpardoned; with all your corrupt nature un sanctified; under the power of that fleshly mind which is the essence of alienation from God; and which, if it be not removed, will inevitably press down your spirits to the prison of endless despair. Are you conscious, then, of living in a state in which, if you die, all this must be the consequence? And are you at ease in this awful condition? Is there no anxiety in contemplating it? Is there no falling tear; no heaving sigh; no secret groan; no crying to God over such a condition as this? O how great is the infatuation of men! May the Lord have mercy upon you, and open your eyes, and pluck you as *brands out of the burning*, and prepare you for the joys of his presence! Amen.

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LITERARY HISTORY OF THE PAPAL CONTROVERSY.

No. I.

GENTLEMEN,

It is matter for devout gratitude to God that he has been pleased within a very few years past—and not a little through your labors to awaken the attention of the American people, to the nature and evil designs of Popery.

This is under God, the *great point*. Let honest enquiry have a free course,—and there is nothing to fear.

But still there are difficulties to be removed, though no obstacles that cannot be surmounted. One of the chief difficulties is the want of access to the proper *sources* of knowledge. The books are often not to be had—and indeed when they are, but few persons know which are able; which accredited; and which not. Such information is a great desideratum among us at this time. It is my purpose to attempt in some manner (through your pages) to supply their want, by pointing out the *proper books*, and *giving some account of their character and contents*. For the better distinction and recollection, we shall name six classes of books relating to the popish controversy, which is important to know something of, in order fully to understand it.

I. The first class consists of the *accredited standards of Romanism*—such as the Decrees of Councils, Bulls of Popes, authorized Catechisms, books of Devotion, &c. &c. These are avowedly infallible—on these the church rests her faith.\*

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\*Books and Documents of a peculiar character which have all the sanction necessary to constitute *Papal infallibility*, and which enter into the essence of their system—and yet of which Papists are sufficiently ashamed to distinguish between this and the former class.—These are the *Taxae*, the *Indexes*, the *Lives of the Saints*, the provincial *formularies*, various legends, scattered traditions, books of devotion, books of discipline, &c. &c.