

There were princes of the Church undoubtedly, and good men in those days, but they did not require a prefix or an affix to be known as such. The institutional machinery was simple, and only later, when encumbered with inventions and covered with patents, did technical and mysterious knowledge develop in it a profession or trade. It did not, apparently, in those early and theologically crude days require a creed to know if men were Christians or not. It did not require a "Westminster Confession of Faith," nor 39 articles, nor leagues, nor covenants to hold men within the fold, but the true-hearted, simple, trusting reliance upon the only true God was sufficient. They were not much troubled at that time, so far as we can learn, about "Plenary Inspiration," "Apostolic Succession," "A Scheme of Salvation," "The Satisfaction of the Claims of Justice," etc. They had not worked out the idea of God's means of grace being monopolized by a favored institution Divinely appointed to deal out the prime article to man at a price; and to stand between man and his God, with the power to grant or withhold salvation. Their motto was, "Freely ye have received, freely give," and they relied upon the Lord and their own willing hands to keep and sustain. In simplicity, as they were led by the Spirit, did they preach the glad tidings, the new Gospel dispensation, the way of life, the reformation, and regeneration of men.

So far as we can learn, it does not appear that they at first intended to separate themselves from the synagogue worship, which differed from the sacrificial service of the Temple. These synagogues formed a network over the land, and were utilized for devotion, personal supervision, and the distribution of charities. They furnished many converts to Christianity, at first known as a sect of the Jews, and the temples with their professionals, the principal persecutors. That the Jewish Chris-

tians, at least, shared in the common worship of the Jews, is natural; but the entrance of Gentile Christians and the enmity of orthodox Jews, no doubt hastened the formation of an organization analogous to the Jewish, yet distinct and more suited to Christianity. The latter was probably more democratic even than the former. The synagogues were ruled by elders who had the power of *excommunication*, and regulated the worship and the charities. The Christian community had elders also, and they are first so mentioned in Acts 11, 29-30. It appears in Acts 6, that Stephen and others were appointed to take charge of the charities, and this is regarded by some as the beginning of a distinct Christian organization.

It is well to note that almsgiving was regarded as a great religious service. In the development of the society, it is easy to see how these supervisors of the communistic benevolence might grow into rulers of the church; and there came a time, apparently, when it was their duty to rule, but not to teach. The teaching or preaching was at first open to all who had, or thought they had, the gift independent of any office. There were difficulties connected with it; Paul warns against women, and James against heedless preachers. After a time aptness to teach became a qualification of the ruling elders. The office bearers of the Primitive Church were selected by the community, and in a manner confirmed by the Apostles.

To conclude as to the characteristics of the Primitive Church, our own Janney says it was distinguished by:

- 1st. A purely spiritual worship.
- 2nd. A free gospel ministry.
- 3rd. Religious liberty.
- 4th. A testimony against war and oppression.
- 5th. A testimony against oaths.
- 6th. A testimony against vain fashions, corrupting amusements and flattering titles.

If examination proves the correct-