

The second characteristic mark is definiteness. If, on the one hand, we must never dare to draw the line so tight as to shut out a single faithful soul, neither, on the other hand, must we break down walls that were not made with hands. Truth must not be made subservient to liberality. There must be definiteness. It is possible to become so broad as to lose all depth. The river, and not the marsh, is the true symbol of the Church's life. And here against the Church's sayings about herself are quite clear. There has been left no room for any doubt, for the nineteenth Article tells us that in the Church of Christ the pure Word of God must be preached, and the Sacraments duly administered according to Christ's ordinance in all things that of necessity are requisite to the same. Then, as a condition for corporate re-union, either now or in the future, sound doctrine must be indispensable. I do not ignore the answer that is always made to that contention,—Who is to determine the soundness or unsoundness of the doctrine? The teaching of the Bible, someone will reply. But in every large city there are half a hundred sects, all claiming to found their distinctive faith upon the teaching of the Bible. Quite clearly, that canon must not be regarded as conclusive. What remains? The Church. It is indisputably true, of course, that the Bible is the final bar of judgment before which every stated truth must stand, but the Bible came from the Church, and not the Church from the Bible, and the Spirit in the Society is the interpreter of the Spirit in the Book. Therefore, if, when we affirm the condition of sound doctrine, our separated brethren ask us who shall be the arbiter, we can only make the same, simple, straight-forward answer,—“The Church, for

“What the Church holds, that we receive;  
What the Saints teach, that we believe.”

Then, added to the condition of sound doctrine, there is the claim of the Church, distinct and clear, to apostolic character, for the Homily for Whitsunday insists that the Church must be built upon the foundation of the Apostles and prophets. At this late stage in my sermon, I must not dwell at any length upon that point, yet I cannot refrain from giving expression to what is my own intense conviction, and, I think, yours also, that the Church's apostolic foundation involves at least the historic episcopate. For, even if the justice of Lightfoot's contention be admitted, and the Episcopus or Bishop be accepted as a later development of the Presbyter or Priest, it is still quite clear that such development must have taken place almost at the first beginning; so that before the middle of the second century the three-fold ministry, as we have it now, was well-established. That, in its most moderate form, is the Church's claim to apostolic character. All down the long centuries, we can look at one unbroken line that began upon the mountain side, when Jesus sent forth the Twelve whom He called apostles, and continues even to this day; so that, in the strength of that unbroken continuity we say in the language of the Creed, that we “believe in one Catholic and Apostolic Church.”

Is that a small thing? Does it matter whether the claim is