

THE COLONIAL CHURCHMAN.

"BUILT UPON THE FOUNDATION OF THE APOSTLES AND PROPHETS, JESUS CHRIST HIMSELF BEING THE CHIEF CORNER STONE."

VOLUME IV.

LUNENBURG, N. S. THURSDAY, APRIL 18, 1839.

NUMBER 11.

THE APOSTOLIC COMMISSION.

This is the title of an excellent Sermon lately preached by Bishop McIlvaine of Ohio, at the consecration of the new Bishop Polk, for Arkansas, from the 28th chapter of Matthew, 18, 19, and 20th verses. We wish we had room for the whole of it, proving as it satisfactorily does, the continuance of the apostolical office, (as distinct from and superior to the other orders of the ministry,) to the end of the world. We subjoin extracts.—Ed. C. C.

What was the peculiar and characteristic nature of the apostolic office? They themselves applied to it a name which will aid the answer. Peter, in addressing his brother apostles concerning the filling of the vacancy caused by the death of Iscariot, expressly styles the office which the traitor had vacated his *bishopric*, or his *episcopate*, as the original reads. The name is so called, in the same transaction, his *apostleship*. Hence, in the writings of the fathers, the names of *apostle* and *bishop* are used as pertaining essentially to the same office. But the word *bishopric* or *episcopate*, in the abstract, only means an office of supervision in general; and this supervision may be either of single congregations, as in the cases of the elders of Ephesus; or of many congregations, as their overseers, as in the case of Paul, who assembled and charged those elders. What then was the peculiar nature of the supervision or episcopate exercised by the apostles, that name, of itself, does not indicate. Whither shall we go to ascertain whether it was a particular or a general supervision, congregational or the contrary? Their commission declares, "Go and teach all nations," &c. Therefore, whatever powers their *apostleship* or *episcopate* embraced, were not limited to any particular congregation of the Church, but extended to the whole Church; in other words, the "bishopric" in the hands of the apostles was evidently *general*, as distinguished from congregational. What particular functions belonged to that general oversight or episcopate, their commission leaves no room to doubt. First, "Go and teach all nations;" or as the more accurate and universally preferred translation is, "Go and make disciples of all nations." Thus was given authority to propagate the Gospel. "Baptizing them in the name of the Father," &c. Here was authority to administer the sacraments of the Church, and by the sacrament of baptism to open the doors of the Church, and of its privileges to disciples out of all nations. Secondly, "teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." These words conveyed to the apostles the authority to rule the Church, as they had made disciples by preaching, and numbers by baptism. An essential part of the government of the Church consisted in seeing to the execution of its ministry. That the authority to do so, to ordain successors in the ministry, was included among the powers of the apostles, is not only necessarily implied in their authority to govern, but also in those impressive words of the Saviour, "As the Father hath sent me, even so send I you." For it was part of the office on which Jesus was sent, to constitute the ministry of his Church; so it follows from these words that it was part of the sending of the apostles to continue that ministry, by the ordaining of others to its functions.

The conclusion, then, with regard to the characteristic nature of the apostolic office is, that it was of a general supervision or episcopate; and conferred essentially the authority to preach and propagate the Gospel; to administer the sacraments of the Church; to preside over its government, and as the chief part of government, to ordain helpers and successors in the ministry. All these powers the apostles held, not as a collective body or college; but severally and individually. Hitherto we have been, as far as we know, upon undisputed ground. Let us proceed.

This apostolic office was intended by the Saviour to be continued; in other words, the first apostles were intended to have successors to the end of the world.

This is undeniably manifest from the promise of the Saviour, annexed to their commission, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." Now, if neither the persons of the apostles were intended to remain to the end of the world; nor their miraculous endowments; nor their distinguishing office; if all have passed away, we are quite unable to comprehend how that promise is fulfilled, or what it could have meant. But the persons of the first apostles do not remain. Their miraculous gifts have not been continued in the Church. It follows then that their distinguishing office must remain; that it was to this office, and to those who should hold it in succession, that the Saviour promised his presence "to the end of the world." No other sense can possibly be put on his words. If then the office of the apostles, as learned from their commission, and interpreted by all the acts of their ministry, was an episcopate—an office of supervision, and that of a general kind—and if each apostle did embrace in his individual office the right to preach, administer the sacraments, exercise supreme jurisdiction in the Church, and under the head of jurisdiction, to ordain and rule ministers of the Gospel; it follows that an office of precisely that description was intended to continue, has continued from that time to this; and will be continued in the Church, by the will of its divine Head, to the end of the world.

But where shall we find this office in the present Church; this union of authority to preach and administer sacraments, with this individual right to ordain, and this presidency over clergy; this original, apostolic episcopate? Evidently, there must be somewhere in the Church at the present time, unless the Lord's word has failed, officers of whom it may be said, without arrogance and in simple deference to the promise of Christ, that in all essential features of the apostolic office, they are the successors of the apostles. Where are they? The question we have no right to treat as unimportant. Whether a most solemn promise of Christ has been fulfilled or not; and if it has, where its fulfilment appears; whether an office intended by the Head of the Church to continue therein, and as its chief office to last to the end of time, has continued to the present time; or whether it has been dropped, and some other placed in its stead, is surely a question of no ordinary importance, by no means of a merely incidental consequence; but on the contrary, of vital connection with the permanent interest of religion, and not by any to be passed over "unadvisedly or lightly," but considered "reverently, discreetly, soberly, and in the fear of God."

But before I further put this question, it is well to remove the idea which so commonly starts up in the minds of those who hear or read on this subject, when any persons holding office in the Church of Christ, in the present day, are termed successors of the apostles, are said to have succeeded to the apostolic office; as if there were some exceeding arrogance and presumption in the claim. Whether it be arrogant or not depends entirely upon whether it be true. Nothing is so humble and unpretending as truth. Did any one claim to have succeeded to the personal distinctions and endowments—the inspiration and diverse miraculous gifts by which the apostles were qualified for their extraordinary circumstances, he would indeed be chargeable with arrogant presumption; because concerning these things there was no promise of the Lord that they should continue in the Church to the end of the world. But in relation to the office of the apostles there is the plainest promise of such continuance, and consequently, however the assertion may sound, it must be true that somewhere in

the Church at this time there are office bearers, either bishops, probyters, or deacons, who severally, and in virtue of their office are successors of the apostles—occupying individually just that relation to the present Church which the apostles, by virtue of the essential feature of their office, sustained individually to the Church of their days. The prejudice that arises against such an idea will not bear a moment's reflection. If it spring from a comparison, as to personal character and fitness, of the modern successors, with the first in the chain, be it remembered that Judas Iscariot was numbered with the apostles by the Saviour himself, and Judas was a traitor. If the prejudice arise from the consideration that the commencement of the apostles' office was miraculous; that it was under the immediate and extraordinary designation of the Son of God; whereas the continuation of the gospel ministry is by the ordination of men, an ordinary designation by fallible instruments; we answer by referring you to the analogy between the new creation and the old, in regard to origin and succession. The beginning of the grass of the field was miraculous—by the instant and immediate mandate of God. It was created in maturity. But its succession from that moment to the end of time was provided for by the laws of ordinary nature. But we hold it to be no arrogance to say of any man though the lowest of his kind, that he has succeeded to the nature of the miraculously created first man; nor to say of the herb of the field that, though it be but the offspring of the little, familiar seed in the ground, which sprang and grew by an ordinary law and a human planting and rearing, it is, nevertheless, in all the essentials of its nature, the successor, in an unbroken line of descent, of the herb which, on the third day of the world, sprang into maturity at the wonderful fiat of the Almighty. I know not that the man, or the herb, is any the less a man or an herb, or any the less descended from the miraculous beginnings of the creation, because the laws of growth were but ordinary, and the intermediate agency of production was but human. And so I know not that a minister of the Gospel is any the less a successor of the first apostles, because instead of receiving his authority, like them, immediately from Christ, it has come to him by the intermediate communication of a chain fastened, at its beginning, upon the throne of God, and preserved as inviolate, as the line of the descent of Adam, or the succession of seed time and harvest, of day and night, of summer and winter. I know not that this day is not a true day, and strictly a successor of that very day when first the sun appeared, though that you know was made by the sudden act of God suspending the sun in the skies, and this arose by the ordinary succession of the evening and the morning. The beginning of every institution of God must of necessity be extraordinary; its regular continuance—ordinary. So with the course of Providence in all its branches. What is now an ordinary Providence was once an extraordinary. What began with miracle is continued by laws of familiar nature. And so it is with the ministry of the Gospel. What was created by the direct ordination of God is propagated and continued by the authorized ordination of men. Its "seed is in itself, after its kind," and at every step of the succession it is precisely the same ministry and just as much of God, sanctioned by his authority and sustained by his power, as if it had been received from the laying of the hands of Christ himself. And so with the office of the apostles. It was the promise of Christ, the Lord, that it should continue to the end of the world. It is not more sure that the sun and moon, seed time and harvest will continue to the end of the world; and though its succession be now in the hands of very feeble and fallible men; of men unspeakably inferior to the apostles in every personal and official qualification;