

"THE BIBLE, AND THE BIBLE ALONE."

(From "Copy," by Right Rev. Hugh Miller Thompson, Assistant Bishop of Mississippi. Thos. Whittaker, Publisher, New York.)

II.

(Continued.)

It makes no difference, then, we see, how much a man mistake "the fathers" and their uses, how firmly he may have the notion of "the Bible, and the Bible alone," he must go to these fathers to decide the very vital question whether he has a Bible at all. Without them, he is utterly adrift. He has a Bible, but he cannot tell whether it is a real Bible or a sham, the genuine word or a forgery of the ninth century. It is on the testimony of the fathers, of primitive iniquity, of the early Church, that he rests his belief that his Bible answers to the genuine Bible as it was given. The Bible, therefore, comes to no man as a book by itself. It comes surrounded by authority from without. It comes with testimonials and evidences of an organic body. The existence of the Church is the evidence of the truth it contains, as the testimony of the Church is the evidence of the genuineness and sameness of the copies. Since this question is to be decided in this way, since we find we can so decide it, is it wise to drop the testimony of the fathers at this point, and having used them to settle the genuineness of our copies of the Bible, shall we dismiss them as of no further use?

Here is just the broad difference between the Churchman and the man who thinks the Bible is to be interpreted by his own private judgment alone. The Churchman believes Christianity, like the Bible, to be one. As the Bible never could be added to or taken from when once given, so the Churchman believes that Christianity cannot be increased or diminished by men. He holds that a complete and perfect system was given for all, that the terms of salvation, the substance of the faith, were announced at the first. The primitive Church, with the Bible in its hand, went forth preaching a definite faith and a fixed system,—its interpretation of the meaning and purpose of the Bible in life. Whatever faith was essential in the first century is essential in the nineteenth. Whatever divine order and discipline was established then, was established for all time. Whatever were the terms and means of salvation then, are the terms and means while the world stands.

There was a gospel preached then, a body of doctrine, a method of salvation, and a rule of Christian belief and practice which the Bible contained for men from the first. The Churchman believes that these are essential to the end. He reflects that the men who first received the Bible were men who knew the authors of the New Testament face to face, that they heard Apostles preach and Evangelists explain the Gospel, that they actually heard "the whole counsel of God" from the lips of Apostles, before they ever saw a line of the New Testament! that, therefore, they knew, as no men can know now, exactly what the meaning and purpose of the writings are. They had the *viva voce* explanations of the Book from the men who wrote it. They heard the substance of it before it was written at all. They believed the Gospel, they lived in it and died in it, were fully instructed in "the whole counsel of God," were "wise unto salvation" before they had ever read a line of the written New Testament!

And so, believing the Bible to be one, the Churchman appeals to primitive antiquity to discover whether his Bible is the genuine Bible of the primitive Church. He finds it is. The appeal settles that question beyond dispute.

But as the Bible is one, so its meaning is one.

It must contain one story, and tell one faith, and reveal one Gospel. There are disputes about its meaning and scope. This man insists on one Gospel, this other man on another. Both appeal to the Bible. Both talk about "the Bible alone." The Churchman sees their difference can never be decided. They might as well undertake to settle the question of the genuineness of a modern copy, by refusing to look farther than the copy itself. Therefore, he appeals to the primitive Church for this matter also. He says "let the men who testify to the genuineness of the book, testify also to its meaning. What sense did they get from it in the very days when men lived who heard St. Peter and St. John teach and preach? What doctrine did they find in it in the very Churches where these Apostles were pastors? Let us call in the ancient witnesses for this thing also."

This is really,—this, and no more,—the meaning of a Churchman's appeal to antiquity. He does not consider "the fathers" of any century infallible. He cites them as witnesses for the doctrine, precisely as he cites them as witnesses for the book. He considers that the Bible contained, for the men of the earliest day, a definite system of Christian faith and order. He sees that the written New Testament grew into existence, was written, collected, and published under that definite system, and therefore agreeable to it. And he infers that that system is the true sense and meaning of the written book, that the Christianity in the life and action of the primitive Church is the true interpreter of the same Christianity lying in the pages of the written Word. He therefore turns to the contemporary witnesses to find what that living Christianity was.

Take the things that divide Christians, that one sect claims are in the Bible, and another sect claims are not there—any of these things it is manifest "the Bible alone" will not settle the difference. The Unitarian asserts that the Bible does not teach our Lord's divinity. The orthodox believer asserts it does. Both, strangely enough, claim the Bible. Suppose they appeal to the early time. Suppose they wisely conclude that Christians from the first, the converts of the Apostles themselves, knew what the Apostles meant to convey as their sense in this matter. The evidence is overwhelming that from the very first Christians worshipped Christ as God. The fact was so notorious that it was a heathen reproach, "the worship of a crucified God."

Take the question of Episcopacy and Congregationalism or Presbyterianism. Unquestionably, there is some form of government, some apostolic organization in the New Testament. The Churchman claims the written record. The Congregationalist claims it. The Presbyterian claims it. The Romanist claims it. "The Bible alone" will not decide it, for the question is about the meaning.

Suppose, again, they conclude that in the earliest Church, when the Apostles were living, or men whom Apostles had taught, it is reasonably certain that any uniform and universal organization, existing all over the world, would not be contrary, but agreeable to the intention of the Apostles, and consequently of Christ. And suppose they ask what this organization was,—an organization which universally existed before the New Testament was collected, and the canon closed. The evidence, again, is overwhelming that all Christians, from world's end to world's end, were members of one Church, with one uniform government of Bishops, Priests, and Deacons, and no Pope, and that this unity and this government were matters of such notoriety that heathens knew them just as well as Christians.

And so with any matter which may be in dispute. The fathers may be cited to testify to a matter of fact,—What was the faith and practice of Christians in their day? We do not cite them to ask their private opinions. We do not care, for the purposes of this inquiry, what their

private opinions are. We ask their testimony about Church, Faith, and Practice.

Tertullian, for instance, advises against the immediate baptism of infants. He argues in favor of postponing it till the child has come to years of discretion, if there be no danger of death. And Baptists sometimes cite Tertullian as a "father," on their side. The Churchman cites him for the direct opposite, because he wants his testimony to the practice of the Church, and not Tertullian's private notions. His testimony is the strongest that infant baptism was the established custom of the Church, else he, Tertullian, would not have been called upon to persuade anybody to delay it! His negative testimony is stronger than any positive.

"The Bible, and the Bible alone," an impossible formula as we see, must be changed to one more in accordance with the Bible itself. That never teaches "the Bible, and Bible alone." It authorizes no man to suppose his private judgment infallible. It does not establish one Pope, still less a million. It bids us, among other things, to "stand in the old paths," to "hold fast the form of sound words," and by implied command, to "continue in the Apostle's doctrine and fellowship."

It is beginning to be seen and confessed by the best, the wisest, and the calmest-thoughted men of all names—Greek, Roman, and Protestant—that "the historic method," in other words, the appeal to the Primitive Church—to "the old paths"—is the only method in which lies a hope of unity and peace.

CONTEMPORARY CHURCH OPINION.

The Irish Ecclesiastical Gazette, of the 15th August contains the following remarks on "The Church and unattached Christians":

The Church is not a fortuitous concourse of atoms, a conglomeration of sects founded upon the New Testament, and set up by man at will at any and every time he pleases in the later ages. If it were, it would need no special hold on the past, and would naturally discard ancient things. The Church is an historic body, with an organization of life, a faith, order, and worship, extending over nineteen centuries. Hence she would not be self-consistent, true to herself, true to the Divine Providence which has determined her life, if she did not maintain her hold on the past, and in many things bring the past forward. That the Church preserves the ancient symbols, retains a Liturgy laden with the memories of the past, maintains the sacramental truths of revelation, is only to say that she preserves and carries on the historic law of her life.

In contradistinction to this fundamental position in the state of unattached Christianity so much in vogue in the present day. Who ever first applied the epithet "unattached" to Christians hit upon a very significant word, and this seems to be recognised in the fact that it is so readily adopted. But it is a question whether, to the popular apprehension, the full meaning of the word is yet apparent. It is supposed to apply to those religious people, who, undervaluing organization, attempt to live in an isolated way, overlooking Church and Sacraments in the indulgence of a general religiousness, as if one's spiritual impulses were a better guide than the law of Christ. It is known that some of the so-called revival preachers and lay expounders of the time do encourage that unattached condition, as if it were of small importance what religious body one joins, and whether one join any provided he live a good life. This is one view of the matter, and it probably expresses the popular definition of "unattached"; it certainly explains the popular idea.

But there is more in the matter than this; the popular error goes deeper; it reaches further than to those who undervalue and decline membership in the Church; further than to