

# The Church.

"HER FOUNDATIONS ARE UPON THE HOLY HILLS."

THEREFORE I WILL NOT BE NEGLIGENT TO PUT YOU ALWAYS IN REMEMBRANCE OF THESE THINGS, THOUGH YE KNOW THEM AND BE ESTABLISHED IN THE PRESENT TRUTH.—2 PETER 1, 12

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## Poetry.

### THE ADVENT ON SINAI.

His robe was of the cloud,  
With lightning braided o'er;  
His heralds, the trump-note loud,  
And the echoing thunder's roar.

On the whirlwind's wing he came,  
And the mountain's awful height  
Was wrapt in smoke and flame,  
By the God's descending might.

He spake, and earth was dumb,  
Like the sea when the winds are laid,  
Like the night when the insect hum  
Is hush'd in the verdant glade.

He gave his fiery law  
In many an awful word,  
And the nations shook with awe  
As His threatening voice they heard.

Again to earth he came,  
In guise of a man forlorn,  
And changed was His crown of flame  
For one of the rending thorn.

The law His hands had given  
He now fulfilled and kept,  
And opened the way to heaven  
For those who in anguish wept.

And He again shall come,  
Thrones shall before him fall,  
And every voice be dumb,  
Or own him Lord of all.

Then heaven along with earth  
Shall to its centre shake,  
And up to a brighter birth  
The whole creation wake.

Thomas Ragg.

### VISITATION SERMON.

(Concluded from our last.)

If our facts and reasonings be correct, we are now enabled to answer the question,—how are we to know a true minister of the Gospel,—one whom we can obey without risking our eternal happiness? He must derive his authority in regular succession from the Apostles; he must be one of their representatives; and this all our Ministers can prove themselves to be. Here then we have a clear and fixed principle of recognition, not easily mistaken, and highly conducive to convenience, regularity, and order. What confusion, and want of solemnity and authority, would the indiscriminate exercise of the sacred functions occasion in the Church? The beauty and efficacy of our divine ordinances would disappear, were they in every man's hands, and they would be dispensed without uniformity, reverence or responsibility. In all churches, therefore, the Apostolic succession has been maintained, with the exception of some Protestant denominations of recent origin.

The Presbyterians contend for it as strictly as we do; and a late writer not only affirms that the government of the Church of Scotland is Episcopal, but that without Episcopacy no one natural branch of the Catholic Church can exist. The difference is, that we trace the succession through the Bishops, and they through the Presbyters. Indeed some of their best writers maintain that none are regularly vested with the ministerial office or can with propriety be recognised in that character, but those who have been set apart to the office by persons lawfully clothed with the power of ordination, and they unite with those who hold the opinion that Christians in all ages are bound to make the Apostolic form of the Church, with respect to the Ministry as well as other points, the model as far as possible in their Ecclesiastical arrangements. Hence there appears only one single step in Church Government between Presbyterians and Episcopalians. If the Moderators of Presbyteries or Synods were consecrated Bishops and Archbishops by those properly authorized, the two churches in point of Government would be nearly the same. This single step we however consider important, as it affects the claim of succession, and destroys the symmetry and beauty of the Christian model. At the same time we agree with a liberal and judicious writer of the Church of Scotland, that the difference between the two Churches is greater in appearance than in reality, and that both widely differ from independence:—we are only at issue on the question of Presbytery as equivalent to Episcopacy; but this ought not to be permitted to estrange the two Churches, which have done so much good in their respective spheres of labour, and which are now through the divine blessing more cordially united in friendship and Christian love than at any former period, and present in the present crisis a combined front to the enemies of truth and order, against which we hope and trust the powers of darkness shall not prevail.

But as both these Churches are strenuous defenders of Episcopacy, though they differ in the manner of its exercise,—the Church of England confining it to one individual and the Church of Scotland lodging it in Presbyteries, Synods, and the General Assembly, from which there is no appeal,—other denominations have complained that according to this doctrine they were unchurched and excluded from the communion of saints. For such complaint there is no reasonable ground; for a church may be imperfect or mutilated, and yet maintain all the essential principles of the Gospel. Our Church declares her own convictions and opinions, but she passes no judgment upon those denominations who differ from her in their form of Government: she contents herself with declaring in her preface to the Ordination Service, that "it is evident unto all men diligently reading holy Scripture and ancient authors, that from the Apostles' time there have been these orders of Ministers in Christ's Church, Bishops, Priests, and Deacons. Which offices were evermore held in such estimation that no man might presume to execute any of them except he was first called, tried, and examined, and

known to have such qualities as are requisite for the same, and also for public prayer with imposition of hands were approved and admitted thereunto by lawful authority.

"By lawful authority we understand that of Bishops alone, who have the sole and exclusive right of commissioning others, as only Bishops have received that power by uninterrupted succession from the Apostles, and through them from Christ himself the great head of the church, so that no man shall be accounted or taken to be a lawful Bishop, Priest, or Deacon in the church, unless he hath had Episcopal consecration or ordination."

### III. The nature of the Commission.

Having ascertained how we are to know the true ministry and that our Church is in possession of this inestimable blessing, we proceed to consider the commission with which the disciples were entrusted. This commission was first given by Christ, as we have seen, to the eleven, and he promised to be with them always, even unto the end of the world. But as they soon passed away, he could only be with them in their successors, whom they had ordained to execute the same commission.

In this sense the Apostles are still alive and represented by those on whom they laid their hands, and so on from age to age since our Lord's ascension. Christ therefore continues with his disciples according to his promise,—not indeed in the way of miracles, but by his presence in the standing provision which he has left in his Church for the salvation of the souls of men. He is the head from whom the divine fountain pours spiritual life and increase on the members of his mystical body: he governs the Church now, and dispenses the means of grace by the same order of men whom he first appointed; for there is no difference between an Apostle and a Bishop except that the Apostle was called immediately by Christ and the Bishop receives his commission from the Apostles. Of this successive transmission from generation to generation every link is known from St. Peter to the present Bishop. Looking at this fact, does it not present an extraordinary manifestation of divine Providence, and prove our Lord's continual presence with his Church? for it is not to be conceived on any other principle that this purity of succession would have been preserved all over the world, amidst wars and revolutions and the actual extinction of nations, for so many years, without divine interference. Is it then wise or pious to neglect a gift thus sacredly guarded by the Saviour himself? The possession of miraculous powers by the Apostles forms indeed a temporary difference between them and their successors, but not being of a permanent nature it forms no part of the commission assigned to the Apostles and their successors. Moreover the Apostles and their successors have in every age committed portions of their power and authority to others, who become their delegates and in a measure their representatives, and are called Priests, and Deacons. Hence the Episcopal system recognizes and consists of three orders, Bishops, Priests, and Deacons.

The consequence of ascertaining the true Ministry and keeping it pure from all contamination, will be most forcibly seen by considering the nature of the commission and the duties which it imposes.

The commission is comprehended in the words, "To make disciples"—baptising and teaching as mentioned as particular branches of that general design and the order of which was to be determined according to circumstances. Thus the adult Jews and heathens were to be taught before they were baptized, but the children of believers were baptized and afterwards taught.

Neither time nor the occasion permit a minute inquiry into the nature of the commission which was to recover men from that awful and unhappy state into which they had fallen, to wisdom and righteousness and the hope of everlasting life; I shall therefore confine myself to one or two things which more immediately point out the necessity of a right and pure ministration.

Remission of sins was to be preached in the name of Christ. Sinners were urged to repent, for the kingdom of heaven was at hand. Now repentance in itself is neither a meritorious nor an efficient cause of remission. It is indeed required as a proof of sincerity, and so far it may be said to concur in cleansing from sin, the great impediment in the way of divine mercy; but the merit, virtue, and efficiency are entirely through Jesus of Nazareth and him only, for there is none other name under heaven given unto men whereby they must be saved. For as the man who opens his window for the reception of light which is of itself ready to enter where it can find admission, does not cause the illumination but only makes way for it, so the sincere penitent who opens the windows of his soul for the entrance of the divine light has, properly speaking, no hand in the work of his sanctification, but so far as he pulls down the sinful obstructions in order to let in the divine influence. And this accords with the words of the Apostle; "so then neither is he that planneth any thing, neither he that watereth, but God that giveth the increase."

As grace is from Christ, one of the principal channels of communication is by his sacraments; but if they are administered by persons not duly ordained, they may fail of the blessing, notwithstanding the sincerity of the recipients, because if these recipients are capable of examining for themselves, who are the true ministers of Christ, they have no right to expect, on their omission of this duty, that the divine unction will accompany the Sacrament. Now it has been shown, that the ministry of Bishops, Priests, and Deacons is a divine institution, sanctioned and exercised by the Apostles who were inspired, and consequently a mode of administration which may be considered actually revealed. It follows, therefore, that out of a Church containing such a Ministry no service of a perfect nature can be performed. How far divine mercy may interfere in cases of ignorance, it becomes not us to say; but to those who have the means of acquiring a knowledge of the truth, ignorance is wilful and therefore criminal. In such cases, honesty of inten-

tion and sincerity avail nothing; we submit to a known error in yielding to an imperfect Ministry, and the guilt rests on our own heads.

The sacraments are channels of grace, but their efficacy is couched in mystery beyond our comprehension: we have no means of knowing, farther than is revealed and sanctioned by Apostolic usage, what is absolutely essential to their pure administration, and what not: we have no grounds of judging, that such and such a change might not affect, diminish or impede their efficacy. They are a holy and mysterious deposit committed to our keeping, and our only wisdom and safety is in preserving them faithfully as they have been delivered to us, and to receive them only from those whom we know to be regularly authorized to dispense them.

It is very easy to speak and argue that a certain change is now essential, and may be conveniently adopted, and that the efficacy of the Sacraments being spiritual, they depend not on forms or the hand dispensing them. On these grounds Naaman argued, when he refused to dip seven times in Jordan; but the Holy Spirit by the mouth of the prophet said, if Naaman will be clean it must be by the waters of Jordan and in the ceremony of dipping seven times. If he refuse to follow this direction he must be content to continue a leper for ever. Saul thought it unnecessary to wait for Samuel at Gilgal, but the Holy Spirit thought otherwise, and the king was punished for his presumption. If we refuse to be cleansed from sin in the way appointed by our Lord in his Gospel, we must die in our sins. In this point of view the ministers of the Church assume a most important attitude; if not duly called, they have no right to touch the ark of God. Few persons, even among the careless and indifferent, would receive the communion from a layman, because he has no authority to administer. And is it not much the same, if his authority is assumed and not derived from the proper source?

In what manner the soul is regenerated by the Sacrament of baptism—how water is made productive through the divine agency of spiritual effects, and thus forms the second birth, is a "mystery of Godliness," beyond the grasp of the human understanding, but it is nevertheless the way appointed to the fold, and there is none else.

In the like mysterious way is Christ present in the Eucharist, and although we are unable to explain the nature of this divine presence or in what manner the bread and wine are made to operate spiritually upon the soul, yet we are assured, "that except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God; and except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, ye have no life in you."

In fine, the Sacraments are a precious, but mysterious gift of God, and our wisdom is to use them with reverent care—not inquiring whether we may dispense with this or that circumstance, but guarding jealously lest by any means we might injure ourselves or offend concerning them: "See that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed thee in the mount." There is, to say the least, a strong presumption that every thing which we have received from the ancient church is derived from the Apostles; and while there is no opposite ground, it is our plain duty to adhere to them, lest we be found changing things which have been instituted by God—and whether they be little or great, we may be sure that we cannot change them without injury to ourselves and the risk of acting profanely. God, when he condescended to give such minute directions about the tabernacle, its curtains, candlesticks and snuffers, would among other things teach us this,—namely, that nothing ought to be considered of small account which he has appointed, or which we may suspect to have come from him.

We may indeed be told that such a scrupulous minuteness of attention to the Scriptures and practice of the primitive Church, would be an infringement on our private judgment; but it is not so. It may indeed be freely granted that rational creatures ought to consult reason in all their proceedings, but this reason, if sound, will suggest the greatest circumspection and the most accurate information in matters which concern our immortal souls. Private judgment is often weak, though the intention be good—principles may be mistaken—conscience may be darkened. In respect to Christianity we have a right to examine into its truth and the meaning and import of its doctrines—but then it is also our duty to make use of every help in our power, and to search the Scriptures diligently whether these things are so. We ought to have recourse to the early history of the Church and writers among the primitive Christians to ascertain the interpretation of the faith and government of the Church in her first ages. It likewise behoves us to consult the proceedings of the more early Councils, and to make ourselves familiarly acquainted with the writings and language of our great Reformers. All this ought to be done more especially by the ministry, whose duty it is to teach the people. Those who from their stations, occupations, and education, have neither opportunity, leisure nor ability for such inquiries, must to a certain extent rely on the honest labours of others for a true account of the truth as it is in Jesus. For all such the Church has made ample provision: she directs them to her approved summaries of doctrine and discipline—to the public and private instruction of her Ministry—and finally she refers them to the Holy Scriptures as the test of her doctrines, which are only to have authority as they agree with holy writ. All her children are therefore at liberty to make such honest inquiry and such modest and discreet exercise of their judgments as their abilities and opportunities permit. Without such precautions, private judgment becomes unbridled; licentiousness brings on in its train rank infidelity calculated to destroy our health and strength. Nor will this deference to such sources of information and guidance abridge our Christian liberty; for as the authority to which we thus bow is nothing more than that which is derived from the Gospel of Christ, it must be consistent with the freedom which he has left to all his

Christian subjects. As it respects for example the government of his church, in whatever points he has given our spiritual rulers power to preside over us, he has not left us at liberty to judge for ourselves, and so long as they act under his commission they take no part of that freedom from us which Christ hath left us.

On this principle our Church proceeds. She enjoins nothing but what Scripture enjoins, and forbids nothing but what Scripture forbids; and so far is she from repressing inquiry, that she declares that if in any instance it can be shewn that her commands are unscriptural, she is not in such case to be obeyed.

As a visible Society, she claims authority to propose the terms of her communion,—a right which every Society recognizes and acts upon, and which other denominations of Christians commonly enforce more strictly than the Established Church. The authority of the Church is binding on all her members only so far as her decisions are consistent with Scripture. Instead of forbidding, she invites men to read the Bible, and to maintain its supremacy over tradition; but she does not tell every man that he is to disregard her authority, or that however unsuitable his qualifications or inefficient his opportunities and leisure, he is to be sent to the Book of Revelation to form for himself a system of religion. In fine the Church of England requires all her members to use their reason, and places no other limitation on its exercise than that our liberty should not be made a cloak of maliciousness. This is rational liberty,—the only liberty which receives the truth without licentiousness; but even under this correct definition, it is to be exercised with discretion and at the peril of the individual. He is responsible to God and man for its use, for it is not to be made a pretence for creating divisions in the Church by magnifying difficulties or urging changes from unhallowed passion.

Although the words of my text more immediately point to the Apostles and the commission with which they were invested, they likewise embrace the whole Church and all her members. This appears from many passages of Scripture, and particularly from our Saviour's encouraging promise that wherever two or three are gathered together in my name, I will be with them to bless them and do them good. Thus wherever the smallest number of believers assemble in Christ's name, depending upon his promises and desiring above all things the advancement of his glory, there is he ever present to quicken their prayers, to strengthen their faith, enliven their hopes, and comfort their hearts; and when our Lord is one of the company their supplications must be effectual. For him the Father always hearth,—and what a glorious encouragement have we here for social prayer! Let two or three Christians meet for the sake of their beloved Master, to worship him in obedience to his appointment, and they may rest assured that he is with them to supply their wants and to bless their administrations, and this inestimable promise is at this day in the course of fulfilment. When the doors of the chamber were shut, in which the disciples had assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst and saith unto them, "peace be unto you."

Now the many appearances made by our Saviour after his resurrection, not only demonstrated the truth of that momentous event by an accumulation of evidence altogether irresistible, but likewise afforded a pleasing and encouraging proof of our Lord's perpetual watchfulness over his people;—by which we are assured that when he is absent in body, he is present in the Spirit, as he was in a miraculous manner in the Apostolic age.

But to conclude:

"I AM," the eternal Son of God, hath founded the Church in his blood: he has proscribed the rule of faith and conversation—the means of grace and the ministry by which they are to be dispensed. And is it a matter of indifference to what church we belong? Are we commanded to contend earnestly for the faith—to mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned and avoid them,—and shall we despise such Scriptural admonitions, and consider all denominations alike, and that it is a matter of no moment to which we belong? Was this Laodicean lukewarmness the practice of the Apostles? Did they preach peace to the enemies of the truth? No, they looked directly to their Master's kingdom, and pressed with divine ardour, faith, and righteousness in order to salvation; and instead of compromising the truth, they hold up Hymeneus, Alexander, and Demas as standing monuments of infamy to future ages for their desertion of the Gospel.

It becomes us, therefore, to imitate the zeal and activity of the Apostles in preserving the faith, and to adopt something of their primitive fervour instead of that lamentable coldness, timidity, and indolence, falsely called moderation, which so generally prevails. Let neither our preaching nor our conversation emit an uncertain sound, by carrying conciliation to the wreck of principle. Remember that our Lord has solemnly declared, "Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed when he cometh in the glory of his Father with his holy Angels." Christ promises to be with his Church; and often in the most wonderful manner has he verified this promise to the Church of England. Often has she been assailed by a combination of fanaticism, cruel superstition, selfishness and infidelity, as she is at the present moment both at home and abroad; and through the grace of God she became victorious, and now we shall be more than conquerors over our enemies, if we trust in our Redeemer, live after his example, and conscientiously discharging the duties of our sacred commission, entreat him in our daily prayers to perpetuate among us that beauty of holiness which we have still the happiness to enjoy. By such conduct we shall fix the Shechinah amongst us, and insure the divine presence to our national Church, and with Christ on our side we need not regard those who are against us. "HE THAT HATH EARNS TO HEAR LET HIM HEAR."