

THE PAPAL CLAIMS.

NO one will imagine that we pretend to give in a single article anything like a complete account of the Papal claims. But we are so often asked to say something on this subject that it may be convenient to set down plainly, and in the most condensed form what those claims are, and why we cannot accept them.

The Roman theory then, is, that our Lord Jesus Christ made St. Peter the chief of the Apostles, and gave to him supreme authority to teach and rule the Church, including the other Apostles; that St. Peter became Bishop of Rome, and that, by the will of God, he transmitted to his successors in the see of Rome the same rights of teaching and government. These are tremendous claims, but they are quite intelligible, and the honest man who believes them *must* be a Roman Catholic, while the honest man who *disbelieves* them *cannot* be one.

Upon what grounds do the Romans base this belief? They say that it is clearly implied and declared in the New Testament; that it was recognised in the early ages of the Church in the East, until the time of the Greek schism, and in the West until the time of the Reformation. We, on the contrary, assert that it has no place in the New Testament, that it was not recognised in the early Church, that it was a gradual usurpation, sometimes stealing silently on, sometimes advancing by leaps and bounds, but constantly resisted in some part of the Church.

"Thou art Peter." Here is the classical text. But so far is it from being true that there is a patristic consensus as to the meaning of those words, that they have three or four different significations attributed to them by different fathers. One thing, however, will seem a fair argument, namely, that if the words did confer upon St. Peter a supreme right of teaching and governing, that right will be found to have been recognized by the Church, and we shall find traces of that recognition in its history, as recorded in the New Testament.

Now, there is no trace of any such recognition to be found. St. Peter was, undoubtedly, the foremost man among the Apostles and, at the beginning, a man of peculiar influence. But he did not preside, although he was apparently the first speaker at the first Christian Council at Jerusalem. The president then was St. James, who summed up the result of their deliberations and formulated their decisions. There is no special deference shown to St. Peter's opinions. There is certainly no hint that his judgment was decisive.

A difficulty no less great in the way of the Petrine supremacy, is found in the case of St. Paul. According to the Roman theory, St. Paul ought to have submitted all his opinions to St. Peter for confirmation or amendment. The facts are the very reverse. St. Paul is careful to say that he had his Gospel from Christ, and even when he went up to Jerusalem to see Peter he tells us that he

added nothing to his knowledge. It is true St. Peter is spoken of as a pillar, but so are St. John and St. James. And St. Paul is so far from deferring to St. Peter that "he withstood him to his face."

St. Peter, then, has no place of supreme authority over the Church assigned to him in the New Testament, nor is there any trace in the writings of the sub-Apostolic age of any such position being conceded to the Bishop of Rome. One of the earliest Christian records that what we possess is an epistle universally accepted as having been written by Clement, one of the first bishops of Rome, to the Corinthian Church, probably before the end of the first century. Roman Catholic writers refer to the tone of authority which characterizes a passage near the end of the epistle. No doubt, there is something of the old Roman style here, and it may help us to understand how the Roman Bishop derived his authority from that of the great city over which he had presided, and not that the see gained its authority from St. Peter. In the letter of St. Clement there is no allusion to any authority as possessed by him as Bishop of Rome, and, of course, not the slightest reference to St. Peter as the source of any authority supposed to be possessed by the Church in its bishops.

The only passage of importance quoted by Roman Catholics in support of the Papal pretensions in the first three centuries, is in Irenæus, Book II., ch. iii. St. Irenæus was Bishop of Lyons at the end of the second century, and wrote against the heresies of the age, arguing that the Catholic faith could not consist of the novelties thus taught, but of the doctrines held and handed down in the various churches where the succession of those bishops was well known. But, he says, as it would be tedious to go through all the churches we may take the great and illustrious Church of Rome.

Now, what reasons does Irenæus give for this selection? Does he say, he takes it because it is the See of Peter? because the Roman Pontiff is infallible? or even because he has a right to hear all cases of appeal? or because he is the prince of bishops? These are the answers that would be given by a modern Roman divine; but there is not a trace of them in Irenæus. He takes Rome not as a matter of duty, but as a matter of convenience. He says it is very great and very ancient, that it was founded and established by the two most glorious Apostles Peter and Paul, without the slightest concession of superiority to Peter, without a hint of any authority being transmitted by Peter to the Roman Bishop. And the special reasons which he gives for believing that the Roman doctrine is true are: first, that the Church of Rome holds the tradition which it has from the Apostles (like the other orthodox Churches), and secondly, that "in this Church the tradition which is from the Apostles has been preserved by those who are from all parts (*undique*."

This is a very remarkable testimony, and it is a proof of the boldness of the Roman controversialist that he can quote it as favouring his own view. St. Irenæus tells us that the

Roman testimony is valuable, not because Rome has received communion and authority to teach the whole Church, but because Rome is the receptacle into which the testimonies of all the other Churches are continually flowing. It is impossible that Irenæus could have written as he did, if he had even heard of the Roman claims. Most certainly his statements are quite irreconcilable with those claims. And so we have come to the end of the second century, and have found no trace of the pretensions of the Roman See being put forth, and still less (if less were possible) of any concession of those pretensions.

It would be easy to show that there is no passage in the writings of the first four centuries which will support these claims. There are many phrases which may seem, until they are more closely examined, to lean that way. When, however, we consider them in their context, we find that, although they declare the high importance and the wide influence of the Roman See, they stop far short of the assertion of the supremacy of the Roman Bishop.

We cannot, at present, follow up the subject in detail; but, in order to show that the first beginnings of papal usurpation were resisted, we may refer to the case of St. Cyprian and the African Churches. Cyprian had the highest regard for the Roman See, and speaks of it as "the chair of Peter, the principal Church, whence the unity of the priesthood took its rise." But this did not mean, in the least, that the Bishop of Rome had any authority over other Churches; on the contrary, Cyprian convoked synods and passed canons, at them which were directly at variance with the expressed judgements of the Roman Bishop, Stephen.

The resistance to these judgements is expressed most energetically by a contemporary of St. Cyprian, Firmilian, Bishop of Caesarea, in Cappadocia. The Bishop of Asia Minor had accepted the African decrees, and Stephen had let loose his wrath upon them. Here is Firmilian's reply, in a letter to Cyprian (Ep. 75): "Let these acts of Stephen's be passed over, lest, while we remember his audacity and insolence, we bring upon ourselves a larger sorrow on account of the things which have been wickedly done by him." In another place he speaks of the "open and manifest folly of Stephen." St. Cyprian was made Bishop of Carthage in the year 248. So we have reached the middle of the third century, and still we find no recognition of the Papal claims. Indeed they are not even asserted in their modern form; but the very beginnings of Roman arrogance are resisted.

One other point may be noted. The Council of Sardica, of uncertain date, but after Nicæa, passed a canon giving priests a right of appeal to Rome. The Roman Bishop, either through ignorance or by design, attached the Sardica canons to those of Nicæa, and quoted this particular canon as being Nicene. The African Bishops denied this character to it, and resisted its impositions. But the dispute brings out another argument against the papal claims.