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"WISDOM IS THE PRINCIPAL THING; THEREFORE GET WISDOM."

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## WESLEYAN TRACTS FOR THE TIMES.

### APOSTOLICAL SUCCESSION:

#### A SUMMARY OF OBJECTIONS TO THE MODERN CLAIM.

The subject of these pages is justly deemed solemn and important. The authors of the Oxford "Tracts for the Times" assign to "the Apostolical Succession," and "the Holy Catholic Church," primary rank among the doctrines which it is the object of that remarkable series to revive; and such are the aspects in which their theory is presented, that their peaceable neighbours are involved in unsought controversy, or silence is mistaken for an admission of guilt. Ours is not the responsibility of aggression; but we dare not now decline the contest. Allegiance to truth requires us to examine statements which are especially calculated to ruffle the uncautioned mind; but it is our highest ambition to commend a righteous cause, no less by the meekness of charity than by the perspicuity of argument and the force of appeal.

Many and influential are the Divines whom we are compelled to call our opponents,—at least on the allied ecclesiastical questions which this discussion comprehends. But it is obvious that, if they are right, thousands of laborious Ministers in all Christian lands are fearfully wrong. Let it not be assumed that these thousands are recklessly and profanely determined to maintain their position. Multitudes of them have given candid attention to the literature of the Oxford Tract party; and they are even now prepared to resign their office, or to seek episcopal appointment, rather than to disregard the gentlest monitions of the chief Shepherd's voice. But noisy declamation, and ever-recurring assertion, will not decide so great a matter; nor ought sincere friendship for any Christian denomination to interfere with the more ardent love which is due to "the Holy Catholic Church," including those, of every nation and clime, who are united to Him "of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named."

Before proceeding, it is necessary to offer a few explanatory remarks. The terms which most frequently occur in the controversy ought to be defined; and the extent of our views, in opposition to the Oxford Tract Divinity, ought to be stated.

The word "Apostle" literally means *one sent, a legate*. The Apostles were, under Christ, founders of the church; and hence their names are written in the twelve foundation-stones of the new Jerusalem. They live in their inspired writings; but, in other respects, their office was clearly designed to be temporary. It is evident, from the cases of Matthias and Paul, that an Apostle must have been an eye-witness of the risen Jesus. Peter intimates that the vacancy in the apostolical college, occasioned by the fall of Judas, is to be supplied by one "ordained to be a witness with" the faithful eleven, "of His resurrection." And Paul demands of the Corinthians, "Am not I an Apostle? am I not free? have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?" It is in consistency with these suggestions that we read of no appointment of successors when the Apostle died; the work of the Apostolate being finished.—"Prophets" and "Evangelists" are commonly allowed to have been extraordinary officers of the church; limited to its primitive age, and distinguishable from its successive functionaries. It was, probably, in immediate connexion with the ministry of the Apostles, that they discharged their eminent duties.

The word "Bishop" signifies *overseer, or superintendent*; "Presbyter," *elder*; "Deacon," *minister, servant or attendant*; "Priest" has been traced, by some, to

Presbyter. But this etymology is doubtful, and, as it is the office of priesthood to offer sacrifice for sin, the name is metaphorically given to the Christian Minister. "Clergy" is a term that signifies *lot, or inheritance*. Its use, in ecclesiastical language, is intended to convey the idea that Ministers are God's "lot" in the church, but the title was anciently given to all "the people of God, according to the text of Moses,—"The Lord's portion is his people, Jacob is the lot of his inheritance,"—rendered by the LXX. *schoumma hieronomas autou*.

The accurate definition of terms is a needful preliminary to wisely-conducted discussion. It dissipates the awe which is often unreasonably inspired by the use of doubtful phraseology, and by the misapprehension of that which is authorized. In passing, we may briefly give two examples.—It is not in holy Scripture, though in "the testimony of writers in the later English church," that mention is made of those who are "associated in the priesthood of Christ," and whose "hands convey the sacrifice." Again, we find the surprising statement, that "the Bishops are Apostles to us, from their witnessing Christ, and suffering for Him." In reply, it is not necessary to demand evidence of the latter clause; though it is by no means convincing. How the Prelates "suffer for Christ," in any appropriate sense, the Tractarian does not condescend to say, but he is not the only advocate of the opinion; since another writer of the same school summons his fellow Presbyters to "support" the Bishops "in the brunt of the" present "battle," and adds, with a sympathy that appears romantic,—"Black event as it would be for the country, yet as far as they—the Bishops—are concerned, we could not wish them a more blessed termination of their course, than the spoiling of their goods, and martyrdom." It is not necessary, we repeat, to examine these pathetic allusions; or to compare them with recent examples of practical disrespect to ecclesiastical superiors; or even to urge that this account of "witnessing Christ and suffering for Him" includes, in the honoured rank of the Apostles, the humblest minister, the female martyr, and the child in the Mission-school who suffers persecution for the name of Christ. Our first definition enables us to deny that "the Bishops are Apostles to us."

Candid readers of this Tract will observe, that we are not now objecting to Episcopacy, as a form of church government.—Guarded, and checked, and brought back to its early simplicity and efficiency, it is an admirable arrangement for sacred discipline; and it cannot be questioned that, in some communities which abjure the name, the real substance of episcopacy exists. And further, in pleading for a ministerial succession, the Wesleyan Methodists will not yield to their zealous censors. Their view is, indeed, supported by the usages of other churches that do not acknowledge prelacy, as well as by the uniform practice of their own community. Ministers officially confer the ministry on candidates. It is their responsibility to testify, by ordination, their belief that the candidate is "moved by the Holy Ghost" to take upon him the solemn office. The orthodox communities require evidence of suitable qualifications; and he who is persuaded of a divine call, must receive also, in all common cases, an official appointment from the ordaining body in the church. This is our "notion of a propagated commission;" and it is, certainly, "as simple and intelligible in itself, as can well be."

To offer the reasons of our own belief is comparatively easy; but it is a more arduous effort to prove that another's theory is false. Every one who knows the laws

of reasoning, will perceive the disadvantage of our position. But no disadvantage, no irregularity of technical logic, shall make us hesitate in combating the pretension, that the right of the Christian Ministry belongs exclusively to the Episcopalian Clergy, because they have descended in unbroken succession from the Apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. Attention is now invited to the difficulties which encumber this theory. The enquirer will perhaps find in the following presumptions, as well as in various facts of church history, and in the closing miscellaneous objections, reason to dispute a claim which is asserted with a boldness that scarcely knows a parallel, and published in our cities and villages with a zeal that is worthy of a nobler enterprise.

Considerations that are merely presumptive we are not disposed to magnify by undue regard, but the following appear to merit distinct and satisfactory replies from our opponents.

I. The New Testament contains no intimation of the doctrine in dispute.—Its reader is not once instructed to demand that his Ministers shall trace an uninterrupted "succession" through the Christian centuries, nor is he once warned against men who cannot verify the long genealogy. And yet, if the doctrine is true, it is tremendously important; and what reverent student of Holy Scripture can explain the omission of momentary allusion? Often have we been constrained to adore the grace and wisdom of the prescient Spirit, under whose guidance Evangelists and Apostles penned such warnings as meet every case of doubt or peril in the church's eventful history; and we still prefer the old Protestant Article of "Holy Scripture sufficient," to the modern refinement of faint revelation "in order to try us whether we love our Lord and Saviour." But the truth is, that, on the general subject, the New Testament is not silent. The incarnate Son of God cries, "Beware of false Prophets,"—and fixes the criterion for the detection; but it is not, Ye shall ascertain their college,—or their appointment by a Bishop,—or heir "succession." These directions may be sanctimoniously given in our day; but they proceeded not from the lips of Him "in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." Of such intruders Christ says, with a divine simplicity that rebukes modern subtilities, "By their fruits ye shall know them."

The evidence of a "ministerial commission" is ample, but inapplicable to the claim which we are withstanding. And it requires much hardihood to assert that our numerous societies are involved in the condemnation of those whom St. Paul prophetically describes as unwilling to "endure sound doctrine," and therefore "heaping to themselves teachers." The awful history of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, is one of the common-places of the controversy; but it appears to have been altogether forgotten that these were clerical offenders,—that they belonged to an order which, we are told, it is presumptuous on our part to affect. The most cautious of our opponents, indeed, rarely appeal to Scripture. They magnify doctrines which, according to their own acknowledgment, scarcely escape omission in the sacred pages. We humbly trust that we are willing "to be guided by our Lord's eye," and to honour "the indications of His pleasure." But these authors are aware that their more specious pleas are not drawn from the Bible; and they significantly appeal to "docile and affectionate minds," on which it is presumed that evidence which the judgment refuses "must have its weight." They concede that, "on this point," (the ministerial commission, as they hold it,) "the New Testament does nowhere furnish a regular and orderly course of in-

struction, such as, on many great subjects, we find in our Creeds, articles, and Catechisms. But," they allege, "the mind and will of our divine Master may be gathered plainly enough, at least by those who are willing to show a reasonable respect to the witness of the early church." Instead of silencing the objector by due references "to the law and to the testimony," they ask him, "to explain why" they "may not do what" their "Fathers in the Church have done before" them? He may well reply, that this is but to remove the real question a single step, and while these "theorists" prudently decline "to cite distinct and palpable enactments," he cannot be terrified by the mere assertion,—though of unexampled boldness,—that, by separating himself from the Church of England, he separates himself "not only from a decent, orderly, useful society, but from the only Church in this realm which has a right to be quite sure that she has the Lord's Body to give to his people." The true Prophet feels that the very silence of Holy Scripture contains an impressive suggestion; while, on the other hand, he ponders the principle involved in an apostolical caution against giving heed "to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith."

II. It does not appear that the necessary registers have been kept and handed down with the stamp of authenticity, by the early churches. But this care was surely due to so great an interest as the notion of the Oxford writers suppose. No formal chronicles on the subject are offered; and we are quite sure that if they existed, they would be quickly recovered, by learned industry, from the deepest recesses of beloved "antiquity." If regular documentary evidence be still wanting, it is not violent or unreasonable to require a substitute. But what can be accepted in its stead? Are we not warranted,—yea, bound,—to expect some attestation of extraordinary and altogether decisive character?

III. The "succession" is said to be derived from St. Peter. But we ask the reason why he, of all the twelve, is thus exclusively honoured; and why, on this assumption, there may not exist twelve apostolical "successions?" It is often said that Peter was appointed the first Bishop of Rome; as there is no mention of such relation, either in his own general Epistles, or in St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans.—And the question which relates to the immediate successor of the Apostles in that city, is involved in much uncertainty.

But, leaving these details, we return to the general inquiry, and ask the argument of St. Peter's pre-eminence. There is a remarkable passage, which is occasionally cited by the less thoughtful of the Tractist sect: "And Jesus answered and said unto him, (Simon Peter,) 'Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona; for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my father which is in heaven. And I say unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.'" On this text it is our satisfaction to quote from the Old Divines; and thus, by the use of their inverted weapons, to subdue some of their less-instructed disciples. The point is "the power of the keys," "the power of binding and loosing;" and this, according to Mede, "is, as it were, a power of oracle, to declare unto the people the remission of their sins, by the acceptance of Christ's sacrifice." "Of the

\* Deut. xxxiii. 9.  
1. Bishop Whiston, cited Oxford Tracts, No. 74.  
2. Oxford Tracts, No. 28. 3. Oxford Tracts, No. 1.  
4. Oxford Tracts, No. 67.

\* Matt. vii. 28. 1. 2 Tim. iv. 2. 3. Mark. xvi.  
1. Oxford Tracts, No. 6.

\* Oxford Tracts, No. 28. 1. Oxford Tracts, No. 74.  
2. Oxford Tracts, No. 6. (Ad. Apud) 3. 1 Tim. 4. 3. 5. Rom. xiii. 11-13. 6. See Oxford Tracts No. 74.

\* Oxford Tracts, No. 28. 1. Oxford Tracts, No. 74.  
2. Oxford Tracts, No. 6. (Ad. Apud) 3. 1 Tim. 4. 3. 5. Rom. xiii. 11-13. 6. See Oxford Tracts No. 74.