

THE CHRISTIAN PRIESTHOOD.

BY RICHARD FREDERICK LITTLEDALE, LL.D., D.C.L.

I. UNDER the Jewish Law there were two classes of men set apart to minister in sacred things for the people. (a), the Priests, descendants of Aaron, whose duty was to offer sacrifices and to pronounce blessings or excommunications, and (b), the Prophets, or teachers, replaced in later days by the Scribes, Rabbis, and Lawyers, whose duty was to instruct the people in the ceremonial and moral precepts of the law.

II. Under the Gospel these two offices have usually been united in the same persons, and the minister who conducts Divine Service is also the religious teacher of the people.

III. The Rabbi or Scribe, unless he were also a Priest, could not offer sacrifices, but the Priest was fully empowered to act as teacher if otherwise competent, as Jeremiah and Ezra were.

IV. So, under the Christian system, while lay persons and even women have often acted as religious teachers, the acts of celebrating the Holy Communion and of pronouncing blessings or absolutions have been forbidden to all below the second order of the threefold ministry, usually called Priests.

V. This is clear from the Common Prayer Book. When a Deacon is ordained he is licensed to assist the Priest in Divine Service, to read the Bible publicly, to catechize, to baptize, and to preach. Not until he becomes a Priest is it lawful for him to act as the chief minister at the Holy Communion, to perform marriages, or to pronounce absolutions.

VI. The reason is because the Holy Communion is a Sacrifice which only a Priest can offer, and marrying and absolving belong to the offices of blessing and of binding and loosing, which are reserved for those of a higher grade, because "without all contradiction the less is blessed of the greater." (Hebrews vii. 7.)

VII. The difference between the Jewish and the Christian Priesthood is threefold. (a), The unbloody Sacrifice of the Holy Eucharist is substituted for the slaughter of oxen, sheep, goats, and birds. (b), The Priesthood is transmitted not to one tribe alone by family descent, but to men of every race and country by successive commission from those first sent by CHRIST Himself. (c), The Jewish Priest could offer in the Temple of Jerusalem alone, the Christian Priest in any place set apart for holy uses. In all other respects the two Orders are closely alike.

VIII. The witness of the New Testament Scriptures is clear and sufficient, though not minutely detailed. Its chief heads are as follows:—

a. Our LORD conferred certain powers and privileges on His Apostles which we do not find given by Him to the mass of His disciples. Very many of these latter (as, for example, the Seventy) were given power to work miracles and to preach. Only to the Apostles did He say, "Do this in remembrance of Me," and "Whosoever sins ye remit they are remitted unto them, and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained." Thus He established at once not merely a difference of rank and honour, but of duty and power.

b. The Apostles acted as believing that they could transmit their special powers, trusting in CHRIST's promise to be with them "till the end of the world," and not merely for the term of their own lives. Thus they "ordained elders in every Church," (Acts xiv. 23,) appointed Deacons, (Acts vi. 6.) And what is more remarkable, consecrated other Apostles, as St. Matthias, perhaps St. Paul, and most certainly St. Barnabas. (Acts xiii. 8.) And after these we find Andronicus and Junias counted as Apostles also. (Romans xvi. 7.)

c. Not only so, but they imparted even this power to others. Thus St. Paul reminds St. Titus that he had left him to "ordain elders in every city." (Titus i. 5.)

d. They taught that an external call to this office was necessary, for "no man taketh this honour unto himself but he that is called of God, as was Aaron." (Heb. v. 4.) No such rule was laid

down as regards the preaching of the Gospel, for every new convert was left at liberty, and even encouraged, to spread the good news everywhere he could. (Acts viii. 4; ix. 19.)

e. They held, moreover, that to usurp the place of a Priest was a sin of a very grievous kind, for St. Jude speaks of bad Christians "perishing in the gainsaying of Core," i.e., Korah. (St. Jude 11.) Now Korah's sin was that he, being a Levite, of a lower rank in the Jewish ministry, claimed to make offerings at God's Altar as though he were a Priest. The only way to explain St. Jude's words clearly and honestly is to say that certain Christians, laymen or perhaps Deacons, claimed the right of offering the Christian Sacrifice, as if they were equal to Priests. The passage can have nothing to do with preaching, for, as we have seen, that was not then, nor has ever been since, limited to one order of Christians.

f. All this is the fulfilment of prophecies which otherwise must have failed. "Ye shall be named the Priests of the LORD." (Isaiah lxi. 6.) "I will also take of them [the Gentiles] for Priests and for Levites, saith the LORD." (Isaiah lxvi. 21.) "In every place incense shall be offered unto My Name, and a pure offering." (Mal. i. 11.) And therefore St. Peter, writing to Gentiles, calls them "an holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices," (1 Peter ii. 5,) and again "a royal priesthood." (1 Peter ii. 9.) So, too, in the Revelation, we are told that Christians are made "Kings and Priests." (Rev. i. 6; v. 10; xx. 6.)

IX. To these truths of the Gospel the following objections are commonly made:

Obj. 1. The New Testament knows nothing of any Priest save CHRIST. He, and He only, is the Sacrificer for the sins of the world.

Ans. This is true in one sense; but, as so put, it is only half the truth. The New Testament never speaks of CHRIST merely as our Priest, but always as our High Priest. Now a High Priest, by the very force of the words, points to lower Priests under Him. So, in ancient times, the King of Persia was called the Great King, because he had many tributary kings under him, and in our own time the Duke of Wellington was called the Great Duke, to distinguish him from less famous dukes. If there had been no other dukes, the title would not have been wanted. Thus, also, amongst English officers of State there are now, or have been, Lords High Chancellor, High Treasurer, High Constable, High Admiral, High Chamberlain, in every instance having lower officials of the same kind under them. So the words of Scripture prove a priesthood under CHRIST, deriving, indeed, all its power from Him, and merely joining in His act as assistants, but still really appointed by His will.

Obj. 2. The words of SS. Peter and John about "a royal priesthood," and "Kings and Priests," apply to all Christians, and so make against a separate and priestly order.

Ans. This is exactly Korah's argument. He went on his own private judgment of God's words, "Ye shall be unto me a kingdom of Priests and a holy nation," (Ex. xix. 6,) and so he said to Moses and Aaron, "Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them." (Numb. xvi. 3.) That was the "gainsaying of Core." (St. Jude 11.)

Obj. 3. The word Priest comes from *Presbyter*, which means only an elder, and the word for a Sacrificing Priest, *Hierus*, is not used of Gospel ministers in the New Testament.

Ans. *Hierus* is the word used by S. John in the Revelation, as cited above, and *Hieratema* by S. Peter. Besides this, there was a good reason for avoiding the word at first. It was mixed up with the notion of animal sacrifices, which were to be done away, and it was easier to use another word than to enter into a long explanation every time of employing the older one. Just so, though Churchmen all hold by Baptism, they do not call themselves Baptists, nor do all Christians style themselves Jesuits, because these words have now a special meaning attached to them which they had not at first. Most people will allow that a Deacon was lower than an Elder, and an Elder than an Apostle, and yet the word "elder" is used of themselves by S. Peter (1 Pet. v. 1.) and S. John (2 John 1.; 3 John 1.) and the word *diaconos* or deacon (translated in our Bibles as minister) is used not only of

St. Paul, (1 Cor. iv. 1; Eph. iii. 7,) but actually of our LORD Himself. (Rom. xv. 8.) The question to be asked is not "What word is used for a Christian minister in the Bible?" but "What had a Christian minister to do which a layman might not do?"

Obj. 4. The Doctrine of the Priesthood is a modern Roman Catholic invention.

Ans. Only an illiterate person could put such a plea forward. The moment the Jewish Law was swept away at the fall of the Temple, the Christian Church began to use freely words which before would have been misunderstood, and spoke plainer and plainer every day as it got stronger. The Doctrine of the Priesthood, and of the Christian Sacrifice, appears in all primitive Liturgies of S. James, S. Mark, and S. Clement, and in S. Clement's letters, all within the first century. And as time goes on, and materials are more abundant, the same truths are ever insisted on, so that the doctrine as taught now is exactly the same that S. Cyprian the Martyr taught sixteen hundred years ago, or St. Augustine and S. Chrysostom about a hundred and thirty years later.

Obj. 5. The Doctrine of the Priesthood puts a man between God and the soul, instead of encouraging each human being to come for himself to God.

Ans. Unless Priests always discourage people from saying their prayers, and so from making their wants known to God, this objection cannot be true in any full sense. But it is true in a partial sense, for the Christian Church certainly does teach that some kinds of spiritual blessings can be had only through the channel of a commissioned order of men. This is (a) the Doctrine of the Bible, and (b) the actual practice of many of those very sects which deny the existence of a Christian Priesthood.

a. God's rule, never departed from save in the case of such special revelations as He made to Abraham, Moses, and the like, is to deal with men through men. Thus He sent Moses to be "as God" to Aaron, (Ex. iv. 16,) and Pharaoh, (Ex. vii. 1,) and to the children of Israel (Ex. xviii. 19). Nathan is sent to absolve David, (2 Sam. xii. 13,) and to appoint his penance. S. Peter's coming is the answer to the prayer of Cornelius, (Acts x. 5,) and so of other cases.

b. The Presbyterian, Independent, Anabaptist, and Methodist sects all restrict the celebration of their Communion Office and several other rites to their "ordained" ministers, and where there are no ministers their people must go without these rites. No sect which retains Baptism allows a man to baptize himself. Another must do it for him, and bring him into covenant relation with God. And when any man is set up by others, or sets himself up as a preacher, what is he but one placed between God and men, to declare, or more often to interpret, God's will?

X. "If the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory." (2 Cor. iii. 9.) Not merely because the Jew looked forward, while the Christian looks back, but because the Christian Sacrifice is more prevailing, the Christian Absolution fuller, and therefore the Christian Priest greater, than the Jewish.

Diocesan Intelligence.

FREDERICTON.

From our own Correspondent.

The Rev. J. H. S. Sweet, of Dalhousie, N. B., having been appointed to the rectory of Newcastle, N. B., desires all postal communications to be addressed accordingly.

MONTREAL.

From Our Own Correspondent.

The Ven. Archdeacon Lonsdale is about to take a fortnight's vacation, and well-deserved it is. No one has more closely stuck to his parochial work than this reverend gentleman. Mr. McFarlane, a student of Lennoxville, now doing duty as lay-reader in the Ottawa deanery, will keep up the services in the interim.