

nature and scope are stated by the writer in the following interesting passage, which might have been taken from a modern sermon: "Let us not think to give heed and believe now only, while we are admonished by the presbyters; but likewise when we have departed home, let us remember the commandments of the Lord, and not suffer ourselves to be dragged off the other way by our worldly lusts; but coming hither more frequently, let us strive to go forward in the commandments of the Lord, that we, all having the same mind, may be gathered together unto life. . . . For I myself, too, being an utter sinner, and not yet escaped from temptation, but being still amidst the engines of the devil, do my diligence to follow after righteousness, that I may prevail so far at least as to come near unto it, while I fear the judgment to come. Therefore, brothers and sisters, after the God of truth hath been read, I read to you an exhortation* to the end that ye may give heed to things which are written, so that ye may save both yourselves and him that readeth in the midst of you" (17-19).

The three remaining writings, the Shepherd of Hermas, the Martyrdom of St. Polycarp, and the Epistle to Diognetus, we shall exclude from our list, as they are of somewhat later or of doubtful date.

The Apostolic Fathers have been subjected to a criticism only less severe than that which has been brought to bear on the New Testament itself. The result has been the same in each case: the truth shines with increased lustre. Bishop Lightfoot, whose judgment and learning were as profound as his piety and moderation, spent the best part of twenty years in collecting evidence on this subject, and has practically closed the controversy for all who set truth above prejudice. There are, however, some eminent scholars, like Professor Pfeiderer, to whom this remark does not apply. He rejects the Ignatian letters as spurious; but he also rejects as spurious the greater part of the Acts of the Apostles. Those critics who believe that the Fourth Gospel was not written until the middle, or even the end, of the second century, naturally reject as spurious the epistles of St. Ignatius, which (according to Bishop Lightfoot) refer to St. John's Gospel a score of times. It could not be otherwise. What a man sees depends quite as much upon his point of view as upon his eyesight. For ordinary Christians it will be sufficient to know that the genuineness of the most questioned of the Apostolic Fathers is not less certain than that of St. John's Gospel.

It may be more than a coincidence that the study of the Fathers synchronises with the brightest days of the Reformed Church of England, and their neglect with the dark st. The weapon of the Reformers was Holy Scripture interpreted, not according to each man's private judgment, but according to the traditions of the early Church. Not that they set the Fathers on the same level as the Scriptures; they recognized the one to be the Word of God, and the other only the word of man; but they triumphantly cited the Fathers as authoritative witnesses of what was believed and practised in the Primitive Church. They freely quoted the Fathers in their homilies and sermons, even on ordinary occasions; but about the middle of the seventeenth century this practice began to be abandoned, and the Fathers rapidly fell into contempt. Then (whether *post hoc* or *propter hoc*) followed the night of the eighteenth century, a night of spiritual slumber, when darkness covered the Church, and gross darkness the people. But with the revival of religion in the nineteenth century the study of the Fathers has also revived. So important did Bishop Lightfoot perceive this study to be, that he abandoned the work in which he had been engaged, with so much success, of commentating on St. Paul's epistles, and devoted the rest of his life to producing his standard work on the Apostolic Fathers.

The trustees of Bishop Lightfoot's Fund have deserved well of the Church by issuing in a single volume the revived text of the Apostolic Fathers, with the Bishop's translation, and short introductions. It is published by Macmillan & Co.; price 16s.

(To be continued.)

"COMING TO THE COMMUNION," OR MEDITATIONS UPON THE PRAYER BOOK SERVICE.

BY MR WILBERFORCE NEWTON.

The Prayer Book Exhortation.

I. "Dearly beloved in the Lord, ye who mind to come to the Holy Communion of the Body and Blood of our Saviour Christ, must consider how St. Paul exhorteth all persons diligently to try and examine themselves, before they presume to eat of that bread, and drink of that cup."

In this passage from the Communion Service a threefold lesson is contained. Here we are taught: 1st. The character of those who are to come to the Communion, "The dearly beloved in the Lord." 2nd. The character of the feast, "The Holy Communion of the Body and Blood of our Saviour Christ." 3rd. The duties of those who are to partake of it, "Diligently to try and examine themselves." First, then, this exhortation is addressed only to those who are called the "Dearly beloved in the Lord." Is there any restriction then, you say? Is the one Lord Jesus Christ who tasted death for every man to be kept simply to the few Church members of the parish? Why is there this line of distinction? Why these two classes in the Church—those who are called the "Dearly beloved in the Lord," and those who are left out? Does Christ love some less than He loves others? Did He die for a select few, for a party, for a nation?

Not so. Christ's words are, "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should have everlasting life." But you may say I do not like to have the Church divided in this way; I do not like to have some persons called Christians and others spoken of as not being Christians. I do not believe that all who are not Church members are not necessarily Christians, or that entrance in the parish register is one and the same as having your name written on the Book of Life. And this may all be very true, but what is to be done if the Church is to be a something different from the world? Break down the barrier lines you say; tear down the hedges; destroy the fences, and the outside sheep will come in. Yes, and by the same principle working in the same way the inside sheep will go out. Christ's words are: "Fear not, little flock, it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" of the future, not the kingdom of the present world. It must be so as long as there are two wills in the world—the will of God and the will of unchanged self. When the end cometh, when Christ shall have delivered up the kingdom of God, even the Father, when He shall have put down all authority and power, and all enemies under His feet, then there will be no barrier line, then sin will be swept away from the earth, and there will be no need to say, "Know the Lord," for every one shall know Him from the least unto the greatest, and the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. But while the Church is struggling with error and indifference and sin, so long as it is a hard thing to be in the world and yet not of the world, and while you feel convinced that all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world, so long must there be a line

drawn between those whose Church is the world and those whose Church is Christ. Far from it that any one should thank God as the Pharisee did, that he was not as other men are. God forbid that any should say, "Draw not near, I am holier than thou. The temple of the Lord are we." This is not the way we are to come unto these holy mysteries; whoever will let him come unto Christ and live, and then this sacrament will help him in realizing Christ's love to him and in consecrating himself anew to His service.

Ye who draw near unto this holy sacrament, remember again your holy privileges: Ye are dearly beloved in the Lord. You should be dear to one another because of your oneness with Christ. Remember the fellowship of the Apostles when they were one in the hallowed presence of the Lord. And let this be our fellowship, one with another. Let us realize Christ's love to us in these symbols of His own appointing, and may we each feel—unworthy though we be—His love to us, as the Apostle John felt it and freely basked in the warmth and light of the Divine sunshine.

II. What then is the character of this feast, this sacred Lord's Supper? It is called the Holy Communion of the Body and Blood of Christ. A feast is always a season of communion. It is strange that both human instinct and human usage have always hallowed the period of feasting with social and friendly intercourse; the feasting of food with the feasting of the minds, the flow of spirits with the invigorating cheer of the round table full of guests. And both in Christendom and heathendom this thought of the communion of spirits at the family board has been made the basis of the sacrament idea, the double communion of sacrifice and praise, devotion for the present and thanksgiving for the past, both thoughts strung upon the central thought of communion with the Divine power. The heathen classics are full of this idea of the feast of sacrifice, we see it in the libations poured out to the gods; in the bloody butchering of whole hecatombs of cattle and in the eating of the cakes of salt. This idea runs through the entire human mind, and it was upon this that the Jewish sacrament of the Passover was instituted. And on the last evening of Christ's life on earth, before the Crucifixion, on the evening of the celebration of this old Paschal feast of unleavened bread, He closes the old Jewish sacrament idea and changes the feast of deliverance from Egypt into a feast of rejoicing over a greater, better deliverance, a redemption for all time and for every nation from a stronger tyranny than that of Pharaoh—even from the slavery of sin.

So then this Lord's Supper is a memorial feast, when we think of the past, it is a sacrament to help us in the Christian life when we think of the reality of Christ's presence with us, when the soul meets the Lord Jesus in prayer,—and this communion is the highest kind of prayer,—and it is a sacrifice of renewed devotion and consecration when we think of the future. Thus by this threefold cord of memorial and sacrament and sacrifice for the past, the present, and the future, this Lord's Supper is most truly the Holy Communion of the Body and Blood of our Saviour Christ.

"Dearly beloved in the Lord, ye who mind to come to the Holy Communion of the Body and Blood of our Saviour Christ," let us thus commune with Him; remembering the past with thanksgiving; realizing His presence with us for the present and devoting ourselves anew to Him for the future; let us draw near with faith, communing with our Lord and receiving this sacrament to our great and endless comfort." And now,

Lastly, let us look at the duties of those who are to partake of this Communion—they are to remember the exhortation of St. Paul, and are "diligently to try and examine themselves before they presume to eat of that bread and