

For the Colonial Churchman.

Messrs. Editors,

I have a few remarks, the fruit of a good deal of thought on the subject of Church Polity, which I would beg of you to allow to be printed in your most valuable paper.

I have been from my youth inclined to religious things, (for which I thank the grace of God) and the differences of opinion in the christian world have often been to me a source of much grief and anxiety. For a long period, in the early part of my life, I knew not which way to turn my head. I was carried away by every wind of doctrine, without being able to see where I was to stop, or which of the many sects which were in existence was the most scriptural. But at length, after several long conferences with the rector of my native parish on the subject, as well as with many of the principal dissenting teachers in my neighbourhood, I was convinced that I could not in reality find any just reason for leaving the Church of England in which I had the privilege to be born. I considered that even supposing that some of the charges brought against her were true, yet they were all so trifling compared with the great sin, and the enormous evil of schism, that they could never be sufficient excuses. And I found, moreover, after further examination, that a most favourable scriptural foundation will be given for all her doctrines, formularies, and ordinances. I also found so many cautions in Scripture against all kinds of religious divisions, and I have since been able to see so much injury done to true religion by these, that I formed the firm opinion that the least shade of dissent, if possible, should be banished from the christian church. I had now to satisfy my mind with regard to the Catholicity of the Church of England;—how far she could be looked upon as a branch of the true church—of that church which was established by Christ and his Apostles and which is therefore called 'Catholic and Apostolic.' If I remember well, I believe the 'Book of the Church,' by Southey, first gave me to understand that our church had been established in Great Britain long before Austin, the Roman missionary, landed there; and that it was not without the greatest reluctance, and without being compelled by the force of secular arms, that the Anglo-Saxon church submitted to the authority of the Pope. Being convinced, by these facts and by several passages in the holy Fathers relating to the Gospel's having been sent in Apostolic times, to the utmost West, and finding also that most of the Eastern churches had never acknowledged the supremacy of the Roman Pontiff, I was forced to draw the conclusion that every Episcopal Church, which had retained the essential doctrines of the Gospel, was a branch of the Catholic and Apostolic Church. I was satisfied that our Reformation was not a schism, but merely a rejection of the superstitions which had been imposed upon us by force, and which we were glad to lay aside as soon as a favourable opportunity presented itself. Thus, Messrs. Editors, I became, and have been ever since, sincerely attached to the Church of England. Such is my respect for this branch of the Church Catholic, that I look upon her as "the Church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth,"—that I revere her as a part of the body of Christ, that I am ready and willing to live and die for her.

But now, Messrs. Editors, allow me to say that I think there is a very great ignorance in the church concerning all these matters. Very few of her members are acquainted with the true principles and government of a church, and many, very many, care little about these things. Indeed, a large number see no difference at all between the church and a sect, and would as soon belong to the one as to the other.

And what is the cause of this indifference? Shall we accuse those who are without, or should we not rather look within for the true cause of this great carelessness on the part of churchmen with respect to church matters? I believe that it is the duty of the clergy never to separate one doctrine from another in their public or private instructions; but I fear it is not always the case. For fear of giving offence, they may be led to make the most important doctrines of repentance and faith in Christ, the constant theme of all their preaching,—and seldom lay before their hearers the necessity for christians to form but 'one body,' to 'speak all the same language,' to 'be of one mind,' and to allow 'no divisions among them.' Now, I call this leaving one portion of 'THE COUNSEL of God' 'under the bushel.' I see such a close connection between every part of Scripture that the whole should be laid before men in a plain and familiar manner. I would never divide Christ from the church, nor the church from Christ. Such are my views on this subject, that it seems to me we should incessantly hold up the church to our people as intimately connected with all the most important dogmas of our holy faith. What is the reason that the Roman church, corrupt as she is, preserves so much strong attachment in her people for all that belongs to her? Because they have, among many wrong notions, that good one of the necessity of unity, and they never cease to hold up the church to their people. And if the papists can do this, how much more may a pure and scriptural church do the same? I must also say that I wish there were a little more discipline in our church than there is; or rather, that our discipline should be revived, and put in force. This might be attended with some disadvantages, but we are sure that true religion could never be hurt by the revival of a godly and wholesome discipline. The clergy must certainly feel the want of this every day. We can hardly reprove an open sinner or profane member, without making him leave the church. The respect for the House of God, or for the ministers of God, is so low that our reproofs, be they ever so well given, lose much of their weight and effect. Many learned divines in England in the present day begin to see this want, and are anxious to apply some remedy. I think, however, the church in these colonies, were she to meet in convocation, might adopt many useful rules much more easily than in the Mother Country. And I cannot but express a hope, Messrs. Editors, that the time will soon arrive, when, with the unanimous consent of our Bishops and clergy, we shall see the true primitive discipline in operation among us. For my part, I would be one of the first to submit to any laws which had the spiritual benefit of souls in view, be they ever so severe, provided they be enacted by the Church of God, and in accordance with the sacred Scriptures.

I remain, Messrs. Editors, Your's &c.
February, 1838.

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Messrs. Editors,

Several weeks ago you spoke of Bishop Hopkin's "Primitive Church compared with the Protestant Episcopal Church," as a work deserving the attention of churchmen; and I have been expecting to see in your pages a few extracts to corroborate your opinion. Supposing you to be otherwise engaged, I propose to assist you, because I feel assured your readers will be gratified generally, and many I hope will be profited. The book is written in such a spirit of christian liberality, and meekness, that it will probably lead many to investigate the claims of conflicting sects which must always result beneficially for the Protestant Episcopal Church.

The work opens with the apostolic commission to receive the weary and heavy laden into the kingdom of the Redeemer; and their fulfilment of this commission by an immediate administration of baptism, and a subsequent admission to the holy Sacrament, accompanied with the encouraging promise of the Lord, that he would continue with this church until the end of the world. Therefore it still exists; although the divisions in the christian church prove a stumbling block to many who desire to be united to the Saviour. To assist in forming a just conclusion the bishop then suggests the following as the most simple process. p. 4.

"If we had lived during the ministry of our Saviour upon earth, and desired to come to him that we might have life, it is plain that we should have approached him in person, and have left all, that we might follow him as did his other disciples. Before he ascended into heaven, he constituted his apostles his representatives, saying expressly, 'Behold I give unto you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them, and whosoever sins ye retain they are retained.' 'As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.' 'Whoso receiveth you receiveth me, and whoso receiveth me receiveth Him that sent me.' 'Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel, teaching all nations, and baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.' Of course, had we lived in the days of the Apostles, our only mode of coming to Christ, would have been to come to them, his appointed representatives; professing our penitence and faith; receiving baptism, and uniting ourselves in their visible communion and fellowship.

"Suppose, however, that we had lived in the age next following the apostles, when the church was no longer favoured with their personal ministry, but only with the ministry of those whom they had ordained to succeed them, is it not plain that we should come to Christ by uniting with these successors of the apostles, who were thus set in their place, and acted by their express authority? And if in that age, we found some societies called christian, who had departed from the apostle's doctrine and fellowship in any respect, should not we have avoided them, and preferred uniting with those churches which continued faithful to the apostolic rule in all things? And should we not have considered ourselves bound to act upon the same principle, whether we had lived in the second age after the apostles, or in the third, or in the fourth, or the nineteenth century of the Christian era?

"But now that christendom is divided into so many sects, is not the path of our duty the same, although the mode of discovering it may be more troublesome? Are we not still required to use all the diligence in our power to select our church according to its adherence to the apostles? And if, through presumption or indolence or carelessness; or the gratification of vanity, or the mere influence of prejudice or habit, we decline the investigation, do we not expose ourselves to the charge of wilful neglect on a point which may, for ought we know, be of unspeakable importance to the spiritual welfare, not only of ourselves, but of the whole Israel of God?

"I am well aware that men are apt to save themselves the trouble of this examination, and satisfy their consciences of saying, it is all the same thing