

any hope of better things? If so, what is to be done? For many spiritual persons within and without the Church, this is my experience, acquiesce contentedly in the present state of things; even justify it; say, it is not a bad thing; or if they do not go so far, allowing its misery and ruin, they take the ground that it cannot be helped; it is impossible to alter it; reunion is an idle dream; and so they dismiss the subject. The Church of England, lately speaking by the Encyclical of her Bishops, places this matter plainly before the eyes of all men. In so doing she takes a place unique in Christendom, for she alone calls for Reunion, and for Reunion, if I understand it aright, on the basis of organic unity in diversity. The Church of Rome, as governed by the Papacy, demands organic unity without diversity. The sects assert diversity without organic unity. The Church of England maintains the true Catholic position—organic unity in diversity. By her Encyclical she proposes, if so it may be, that means may be found for the reunion of Christians on the basis of Holy Scripture, the two Creeds, the two Sacraments, and the Historic Episcopate. The Historic Episcopate being the sign of the presence of the Church, the bond of its progress and the guarantee of its continuance. To keep truth before the minds of men is to do a great thing, for truth is great and will prevail. We may therefore believe that the continued assertion of the misery and loss of division, must cause searching of heart, and inquiring of one another and before the Lord, touching this thing. Whether anything could be done to any purpose by meetings between the leaders of the various denominations and of the Church, to explain our position and to remove objections, I must leave to those more qualified than I am to say. One thing seems to me plain, Reunion can never be forwarded, but hindered, by fellowship with Nonconformity in its present position. Interchange of pulpits, taking part in their public worship, recognising their ordinations, would be, it seems to me, fatal to the cause of unity; because it would be sanctioning their visible systems, which are rival and opposed to the Church; it would be obscuring, in the eyes of Nonconformists, the truth that it is their visible systems which are a violation of Christ's order—'ONE BODY.' Is the one life they and we have in Him manifested in the visible system they have set us? Does any one suppose that Nonconformity co-operates with the Church? Does Nonconformity co-operate with itself? Alas, too often, only when moving in ranks hostile to the Church. While we cannot approach Nonconformity in this way, we may approach Nonconformists; and should do so in the most brotherly way. We must think of them, and speak of them, and to them as 'dear brethren'; and the most fruitful work, it seems to me, is plainly to put the subject before them in the light of the New Testament, and ask them—'Will you pray every day about it?' (2) The Church can do much, yea most, here by prayer; by inviting and suggesting prayer. Do not let us think this a small thing, ourselves to pray and to get others to pray for this thing. Let us be hopeful. On this subject of hope in dark days, let us listen to the beautiful words of Lacordaire: 'I often think of the Catacombs. It is there I go when my hope is wavering, and I need to recover all the energy of my soul in order to bear the burden of the unknown. I see those poor, those workmen, those slaves, all that obscure people hidden under the triumphal Rome of Augustus and Trajan. The universe weighed on their conscience with a weight of forty centuries, the Rome added to this pressure of the ages the bloodstained weight of her terrible domination. And they, what had they in point of visible fact to oppose to the world as it then was, as it has ever been? They had nothing but Man dead in Judæa on a cross, and to His t added their own unshrinking death. After many days spent in fasting and silence, there

brought one evening, amid the shadows of the night and the gleam of torches, the martyred remains of some of their number. They counted the wounds, their eyes saw and their hands touched the furrows that torture had torn in those frail limbs which nothing had protected against the might of the empire. Those who gathered them up told in low tones of the furious cries of the multitude against the martyrs, and how with unwavering patience they died. No tears fell on those sad relics. The primitive Church did not weep, she hoped; and each martyred body placed behind the sepulchral slab was for ever an additional foundation for the City of God, the basis of the future victory, and her appeal to the invisible justice, awaiting the hour when it should become visible. Thus passed 300 years, the most beautiful the world has ever seen; for they were years of unwavering hope which justified but unconquerable faith in the death of man preceded by the death of God.' (*Lettres sur la Vie Chrétienne*, pp. 3-5)

We have passed from the shadows of the Catacombs into the light of day, and we have under our eyes a sadder sight than the broken limbs of Christ's body. Our eyes may see, our hands may touch the shattered body of Christ itself. But let us be men of hope. The early Church hoped, and we, children of the same Church, must hope too. Every mind in which we place the thought of unity, every heart in which we kindle the desire for unity, every soul in which we raise the prayer for unity, every life in which we obtain the witness to unity will be enlarging the foundations for the City of God, will be widening the basis for the coming victory, will be, at all events, our response to the will of the Lord for unity, and our appeal to the invisible unity of the City of God, hastening the day and awaiting the hour when it shall become visible.—*From the Lichfield Diocesan Magazine.*

#### COMMISSIONED OFFICERS.

The first Sunday after Easter brings before us the same great subject which is taught on the third Sunday in Advent, viz., our Lord's commission to His Apostles; but emphasized by the account of the first great schism, i.e., the rebellion of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. It is indeed strange that any one should hear the lessons for this Sunday, in conjunction with the Gospel, without feeling at any rate a suspicion that the very prevalent Nonconformity of the present day may not be according to 'the mind of Christ,' and that those 'ministers' who are not episcopally ordained may after all though acting with the best intentions, be among those who have not been 'sent.'

More than twenty years ago a volume was published of *Lectures on Church Principles*, one of which was by the late Rev. Dr. Oldknow, on 'The Apostolical Succession.' That very able man made some excellent remarks on the subject of the Divine commission of the clergy. He first points out how our Lord's words, 'As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you,' imply that His own high commission involved the power of sending others, and that as His commission to the Apostles, was of the same kind—'even so'—He therefore was giving them the power of similarly commissioning others after them. And subsequently the lecturer shows that this commission makes 'all the difference' between those who have it and those who have it not.

'Those, then,' he says 'who have received Christ's commission and authority at the hands of a Bishop—and those only—can lawfully preach and minister the sacraments. Others may have better natural qualities for the work, but if they have not been duly sent to do it they have no right to do it. For the ability to

do a thing does not give one a right to do it. For instance, a man may have the ability to discharge the duty of a magistrate, but still he may not undertake the office without the commission of the Queen. And if he were to take upon himself such an office, any act he might perform in such a character, however just and right in itself, would not possess the slightest legal weight. But the action of another who had the Queen's warrant for what he did whether transmitted immediately from herself or through her ministers it would not matter—however ignorant and incompetent he might be, provided his actions did not contravene the law, would stand good and be recognized by supreme authority. The commission of the Sovereign makes all the difference. A man who bears that commission, however, unfit for the dignity which it confers or unequal to the duty which it prescribes, is her officer; whilst one who bears it not, though in every way capable of both supporting its dignity and discharging its duties, can have no claim to be considered such. And in like manner a man who has received the Lord's commission, though little qualified to fulfil it, or even acting unworthily of it, until he be deprived of it by the same authority through which it was given is still His minister and capable of acting in His name for the advantage of those who may have recourse to him; whilst, on the contrary, another, though endowed with every qualification for its efficient fulfilment, acting as though he were really in possession of it, assumes a character to which he has no lawful pretension, and the acts he performs are unauthorized and sacrilegious. He may indeed act through ignorance, through the force of peculiar circumstances, through a zeal for God and a desire to promote the everlasting welfare of his fellow-creatures, and Almighty God—whose property it is to bring good out of evil—may bless the ministrations of such to men's spiritual good, but this does not render lawful their usurpation of an office to which they have received no valid appointment, nor alter the character of the acts which they accordingly perform.'

No apology is needed for the length of this extract. It is doubtful whether the meaning and force of the terms 'commissioned' and 'authority' could possibly be brought home to the minds of ordinary people more plainly and simple than by those words of Dr. Oldknow's.

And the lesson he thus enforces is one which it is very necessary to bear well in mind while we are anxiously striving to promote anything which may make for Home Reunion. Longing as we do for that consummation so devoutly to be wished, we must never forget that there are principles which we have no right to sacrifice, being as they are not of man's invention, but of Divine institution.—A. M. W., in *Church Bells*.

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