

THE HOMILETIC REVIEW.

VOL. XIX.—MAY, 1890.—No. 5.

REVIEW SECTION.

I.—WHAT CONSTITUTES THE CHURCH?

BY HOWARD CROSBY, D.D., NEW YORK.

ETYMOLOGY is an unsafe guide to a word's meaning, for usage carries off a word oftentimes very far from its etymological meaning. "Dilapidation," for example, could etymologically be applied only to a *stone* house, yet we apply it properly now to a wooden house as well. Who would restrict the word "cynosure" (so often used regarding beautiful women) to its etymological meaning of "dog's tail"? The explanation of the Greek word for "church" by its etymology, so often made by writers, is an error. When the word *ἐκκλησία* was used in the time of our Lord, it simply meant an "assembly," and was the translation of the Hebrew "qahal," which is translated in the English by "assembly" and "congregation." The word occurs only three times in the Gospels, and they are all in Matthew. One is where our Lord says "upon this rock I will build my *church*" (ch. xvi : 18), and the other two are in ch. xviii : 17, "tell it unto the *church*, but if he neglect to hear the *church*." In other parts of the New Testament than the Gospels it occurs 112 times, and in all of them (except the three in Acts xix, referring to an assembly of citizens) refers to the people of God as an organization. The *ἐκκλησία*, though simply an assembly, was more or less an organized assembly. Even that boisterous crowd in the theater at Ephesus (Acts xix), which is called an *ἐκκλησία*, pretended to be organized. The town-clerk made a contrast between it and an *ἐννομος ἐκκλησία*, as one that would be *legally* called, but the session being in the theater points to an organized assembly rather than a mob.

If, therefore, we follow usage, the church in its original sense, as denoted by the Greek word *ἐκκλησία*, is the congregation of believers in an orderly form. That it consisted only of believers or of professed believers is evident from its very appointment and purpose. Christ appointed *disciples*, and gave such his precepts and his commission to disciple others. The command left room for false disciples. There