

The Church Guardian.

Upholds the Doctrines and Rubrics of the Prayer Book.

"Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity."---Eph. vi., 24.
"Earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints."---Jude: 3.

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HOME REUNION NOTES.

XXX.—THE APOSTLES' FELLOWSHIP.

Church Bells has the following:—

SIR,—I send some valuable remarks by way of summary and comment on my former letters on the Christian Ministry, kindly sent to me by the Rev. H. C. Powell, rector of Wylye, with permission to publish.

NELSON.

It is not simply a question of History. We must take into account, together with the historical evidence, that *the Church is the unique and peculiar creation of Jesus Christ*, and that He was emphatically the Builder and Former of her; that the ministry, when examined closely, reveals a nicety of adjustment, especially in the relations to one another of the Episcopate and Priesthood, which more than suggests peculiar care and wisdom in its framing; and that when, in the light of history, we find conclusive evidence that rejection of the threefold ministry, or alteration of the primary relations between its orders, has invariably been accompanied by breach of unity and loss or change in respect of the faith, the supposition of this feature of the Church's being having been an accidental growth, or of its having had any other origin than in the Divine wisdom of her great unseen but ever-present Lord and Head, must, as we think, be altogether excluded.

The considerations which, omitting much for the sake of brevity, appear to be of the greatest weight, are the following:—

1. Our Lord laid the greatest stress upon the principle of *authoritative mission, from above*, as being essential for the exercise of any ministerial office. This is shown by His emphatic and repeated statements respecting His own mission from the Father; by the manner in which He characterized the authority with which He invested the Apostles—an authority continuous with and flowing from the authority which He Himself had received—"All authority has been given unto Me in heaven and on earth: go ye therefore." "As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you";—and by the expression of His mind through the Apostles in the times after His Ascension. St. Paul, for example, points to the authority and mission which our Lord had given him, with as much emphasis and frequency as our Lord Himself had used in speaking of the authority which He had received. Nor was this due to the necessity of exhibiting credentials only. It was a testimony to the principle of authority in itself. When we read in the Epistle to the Hebrews how "Christ glorified not Himself to be made an High Priest, but He that said unto Him, Thou art a Priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek," we cannot but be conscious that the principle of authority receives here an attestation to its importance which it is not for us to measure. "How shall they preach except they be sent?" is in truth written broadly across the volume of the New Testament. There can be no doubt, therefore, about the *principle of authority*, or the place which it occupied in the mind of our Lord. Authority from above there must be in the Church of Jesus Christ.

2. The principle of authority from above as the strength of the Church's ministry, and the par-

ticular form of the ministry itself, are two different things. In the times very shortly after the death of the Apostles a *Threefold Ministry of Bishops, Priests, and Deacons, became universal in the Church*, and has ever since been regarded by the Church as a feature of deep importance to her. Most of those who have rejected this ministry—a very small number in comparison with those who hold to it—felt in doing so, and feel now, as your Lordship has shown above (Letter xxvii.), that they have parted from a thing of price. Could this threefold ministry—so established, so regarded—have been acquired by the Church without the Builder? Is not His mind embodied in it? By His permission or by His appointment it must have come into being. By which was it?

The considerations which determine us to believe, distinctly and decidedly, that in the threefold ministry—each order of it having its duly apportioned measure of function and of authority—we see the channels determined by our Lord for the conveyance of Divine grace, are briefly these:—

(a) The threefold ministry of bishops, priests, and deacons, is not only a great historical fact, but it is a feature of the Church which history and experience show to have the weightiest bearing on the preservation of *the faith* once for all delivered to her, of which she is "the pillar and ground," and on the preservation of *unity*.

The connexion of the maintenance of the threefold ministry in its integrity and in its due adjustment of function and power, with the preservation in purity and completeness of the deposit of doctrine, is written in the plainest characters upon the page of history. In the Roman communion on the one hand, and in the Protestant sects on the other, we see at any rate changes in the faith and changes in the three-fold ministry in most suggestive companionship. And in the Roman communion the development of change in the ministry has at each step been accompanied by a corresponding development of change in the faith. It is impossible, therefore, to miss seeing that there is a real connexion between the two developments. In the Roman communion the Episcopate has been for ages shorn more and more of its independence, and its powers have been more and more concentrated in its one bishop, the Pope. And at each stage of this process there has been a corresponding degree of development of those forms of doctrine by which the faith of Rome stands distinguished from the faith of the Primitive Church, and especially of the *cultus* of the Blessed Virgin. Moreover, in all that is peculiarly Roman in doctrine there is a motive apparent, and that motive is the development of the Papacy.

Look now on the other side. Whilst in connexion with her alteration of the ministry—which in form she still maintains and bears witness to—Rome has either added to the Faith or changed the holding of doctrines forming part of the Primitive Faith, the Protestant bodies which have rejected the ministry have, together with it, *lost* considerable portions of the Faith of Christ. They have lost the doctrine of the Sacraments especially, which at the time of their first separation the Lutherans and the Calvinists (as the *litera scripta* of the Articles of those bodies still witnesses) were minded to retain.

Then look at the question of *unity*. Strike off

from the Papacy its monstrous accretions of power and restore the ancient independence of the Episcopate, and can any one doubt that the way would then lie open towards a restoration of the Church's broken unity? Can any one doubt that those developments of doctrine which have grown with the growth of the Papal power would be cast off in no long time when it was gone? The Old Catholics in Germany are a proof of this. They have rejected the Papacy, and their faith differs now but little from our own.

Looking at these things, is it not manifest that the maintenance of the threefold ministry in purity and integrity is most intimately bound up with the preservation both of the Church's faith and of the Church's unity? The conclusion from this is evident. A feature of the Church upon which so many depends could not have come into being merely by the *permission* of the Great Head of the Church, it must have been by His *overruling guidance*, if not by His *direct appointment* that she obtained it.

(b) This consideration is indefinitely strengthened when we take into account the proofs of our Lord's presiding care in the formation and building of His Church. "I will build My Church," He said. And again, "Lo, I am with you all the days, even unto the end of the world." The book of Acts is an express record of His working in and with His Church after His Ascension. In the book of Revelation, which is an unveiling of the principles determining the spiritual history of the Church to the end of time, our Lord is manifestly the chief Actor. As in all that related to her inner life, so in every detail of her outward organization, the form which she received was received from Him. If it was through the operation of the laws of natural development that He caused His Church to attain that constitution of the threefold ministry which she has ever since retained, the fact that its form and its authority was altogether His gift to her is in no way altered thereby. "He gave" (Eph. iv. 11; the word "He" is emphasized in the original Greek) "some to be apostles and some evangelists," and whatever channels of authority and of grace the Church had in the days before the threefold ministry became fixed and permanent. Could the Divine Builder of the Church in the times preceding the death of the Apostles, have ceased to be the Builder in the times which succeeded?

(c) The information of history in the New Testament and in after Church-writers, agrees entirely with the foregoing considerations. The New Testament writings carry us historically to the epoch of the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The Apocalypse and, as some suppose, the other writings of St. John alone lie beyond this date. If it was designed that the Church should attain her threefold ministry, in accordance with the laws of natural development, gradually, each order being established as the need for it arose, we could only have such historical intimation as we have got. We read of the first delegation of authority from the Apostles in the ordination of the seven. "We read of their ordaining Presbyters regularly in every Church (Acts, xiv. 23). St. James in Jerusalem occupies a position beside, and in some respects above, the chief Apostles, which it seems impossible to account for except on the supposition that he had been appointed Bishop of the Church in Jerusalem.