

SERMON.

Preached by the Rev. Canon Stennett, M. A., Rector of Cobourg, on the occasion of the Ordination Service at All Saints' Church—Sunday, Jan. 7, 1877.

St. John, xx. 21. "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you."

The preface to the Ordinal in the Book of Common Prayer declares that "It is evident unto all men diligently reading the Holy Scriptures and ancient authors, that from the Apostles' time there have been three orders of ministers in Christ's Church: Bishops, Priests, and Deacons;" and it further declares that "to the intent that these orders may be continued, and reverently used and esteemed," no one shall be accounted a lawful minister of the Church, or suffered to execute any function therein, except he has received Episcopal ordination. It is, brethren, in the execution of his Apostolic function that the Bishop is here with you to-day; and he has deputed to me the duty of delivering the discourse bearing on the subject; which discourse you will also see by referring to your Prayer Books is required on these solemn occasions. Those who have been trained up from childhood in the teaching of the Church naturally accept without investigation the great fact to which our Prayer Book (as you have heard) bears testimony, that there have always been in the Church of Christ since the Apostles' time three orders in the ministry—bishops, priests, and deacons. But it would be well for all who can do so to examine into this important matter for themselves, and endeavour so to inform their own minds on the subject that they may be ready to give an intelligent reply to objectors. This is an enquiring and investigating age, and truth never suffers by investigation. Our Evangelical Church, as the champion of truth and sound doctrine, invites investigation on this and every other point of her teaching. The Romanist denies the validity of our orders, and non-Episcopal bodies deny the doctrine of Apostolical Succession generally, and the fact of three orders in the ministry in particular. But against all these our Church appeals to facts, and claims and courts enquiry, knowing that enquiry honestly made will assuredly lead to but one result—the confirmation of her claims and the vindication of the truth. In so short an address as this must necessarily be, it would of course be out of the question to attempt to discuss the subject; but I purpose to direct your attention very briefly to the two sources of proof of the fact of the threefold order of the ministry named in the preface to the Ordinal. These two sources of proof are, as you will find, (1) the Holy Scriptures and (2) the ancient authors or writers of the Church. Now, I must premise that the Church, which is in the New Testament called the "kingdom of God," was not for the first time called into being when our blessed Lord wrought His miracles on earth, collected disciples around Him, taught and commissioned them, and commanded them to "disciple" others, and administer the sacraments, after that He himself should be taken from them. No: the Church of Christ was a continuing one, but under a new dispensation, of the old Jewish Church to which Abraham and the patriarchs, and David and Samuel, and the prophets all belonged. To this ancient Jewish Church God gave special ordinances: He gave it the Old Testament to guard and maintain in purity. He gave it a holy ministry constituted in three orders—High Priest, priests of the family of Aaron, and Levites. He gave it a holy temple, also, with divinely appointed service and ceremonial. He gave it the sacraments of Circumcision and of the Passover. And when the Holy One of God took upon Him our nature, and in that nature became the one High Priest for all mankind, then all these old things, which were intended only as foreshadowings of the new and true, having effected their object of leading to Christ, passed away, and were yet continued on and more fully developed in that spiritual temple—that "House of Prayer for all people"—the Christian Church. The great temple at Jerusalem ceased to be, but Christ, "the living temple," prepared his own body to be the centre of union for the Christian Israel. The High Priest ceased to be, but Christ Jesus in Himself fulfilled all the sacrifices and types and figures of the Mosaic law, and entered at length into the Holy place of

Heaven, where still he pleads His own body as our propitiation, and offers it continually—as St. John saw in a vision, "A lamb as it had been slain"—before the throne of the Eternal. Priests and Levites ceased to be, but found their successors in the priests and deacons of the Church. Circumcision and the Passover ceased to be, but were renewed and perpetuated in the evangelical ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's supper or the Holy Eucharist. Thus, then, the Church of the New Testament is the Church of the Old, but with more spiritual ordinances, and "a better covenant." No need of types and shadows when the looked-for substance had come; all were fulfilled and perfected in the person of the Lord Jesus, who is to us "all in all." But the Church which our Lord thus renewed and founded on the "better covenant" of grace was, like its predecessor, intended to be in the world a visible body, an organized body, a body "fitly joined and compacted together." It was intended to be more permanent and abiding than the Church of the Circumcision; It was intended not only for one nation, but for all mankind. All men were to be drawn into it, as into a great net, by the faithful preaching of the new covenant of grace and mercy. How, then, could this be done without a settled ministry, a perpetuating ministry? How could multitudes, as age succeeded age, be drawn out of the world and made members of this spiritual body unless there were not only appointed doctrines and ordinances, but persons set continually and continuously apart to teach those doctrines and administer those ordinances? Hence we find our Lord selecting first of all chosen men to be His immediate attendants, witnesses of all His words and acts; afterwards as the work went on we find Him sending out "70 others also" by twos to preach and proclaim His coming. Here then, even during our Lord's stay on earth, we find the ancient Jewish organization of the threefold ministry preserved, though presented in a new form. Christ Himself the high priest, the twelve Apostles standing for the priesthood, and the seventy disciples representing the Levitical assistants. Again, after our Lord had ascended into Heaven and had poured down upon His Church the spiritual gifts necessary for the work of evangelizing the world, we find the apostolate first filled up to the original number twelve to supply the place of the traitor Judas; then presbyters, or elders or overseers, ordained by laying on of apostolic hands wherever a Christian Church was founded; and lastly, deacons, originally appointed for a specific purpose but afterwards ordained as a permanent order to assist the presbyters or elders in their pastoral duties. And although during the lifetime of the Apostles the name of bishop (which simply means "overseer") was unquestionably applied to presbyters or elders, as being, in the absence of the Apostles, literally "overseers" of their respective flocks, yet never in the history of the early Church were the apostolic functions of the laying on of hands in Ordination ever attempted to be exercised by the second order of the ministry. Now this is the material point to which I would specially draw your attention; for it is a mere juggle of words which has caused so much misunderstanding and heartburning, yea, and schism in the Church of Christ. We readily admit that while the Apostles lived, and themselves acted as general bishops over the churches which they respectively established, the mere name "bishop" or "overseer" was applied sometimes to presbyters; yet no one is bold enough to assert that any presbyter exercised the apostolic functions of ordaining and confirming during the lives of the Apostles themselves. Now, what we have to deal with is the office and the acts appertaining thereto and not the name. When the Apostles died, then what became of their special functions so necessary to the perpetuation of Christ's Church? Did these die with the Apostles? or were they by them committed to others? Why, undoubtedly they were by them committed to others; and those others were ever henceforward styled bishops, and to such men so consecrated was that title restricted ever afterwards, to be transmitted by them also to their successors, and so on to the end of time. The Apostles knew their Lord's will, and in accordance with it we find Titus consecrated by apostolic hands to be first Bishop of Crete, and in

his consecration specially gifted with the peculiar powers of ordaining and confirming. Similarly James (not one of the apostles as sometimes wrongly supposed) was appointed first Bishop of Jerusalem, and Timothy the first Bishop of Ephesus. These I have named as being among those mentioned in Holy Scripture who were endowed by the Apostles themselves with power of government, with authority over elders and deacons, as well as with the exclusive spiritual function of ordaining to the priesthood and diaconate. Now these men unquestionably were no mere presbyters, but were clearly of an order higher than those whom they ruled and ordained; they were divinely appointed to exercise power which the Apostles had previously alone exercised, and therefore were bishops in the highest sense, and as all ecclesiastical history accepts the name. And now I must refer to the second source of proof which the Church has always appealed to in support of its threefold ministry—namely, "Ancient authors" or writers on Church matters since Apostolic times. For we must bear in mind that the Church of Christ, being a recognised definite body having a recognised organization and a life and existence separate from the world, has had all along its own history, distinct from secular history, and its own writers, the earliest of them contemporary with men who had seen and heard Apostles themselves. And these writers have recorded the facts connected with its organization, its struggles with the heathen world, and its final triumph and establishment on the ruins of heathenism. Now, it is an undoubted truth—a truth unquestioned by the strongest opponents of Episcopacy—that from the first century onwards there was never known such a phenomenon as a Christian Church without its bishop, its priests, and its deacons. Not one of these ancient authors even so much as raise a question with regard to it, it was a fixed fact—a bishop in every district where the Church existed, with his subordinate presbyters and deacons; all looking up to and reverencing their bishop, not merely as an ecclesiastical superior, but as their spiritual Father in God. Many, too, of these "ancient authors" have lists of the bishops of some of the more important sees even from the Apostles' times; not a link missing, but name succeeding name as regularly as the succession of the kings and queens of England. And those records were preserved in every church, and handed on from generation to generation with reverential care. Let us now pause for a moment and ask ourselves: How came this universal existence of three orders everywhere, even before the death of St. John the Apostle and Evangelist, if, as opponents assert, there were originally but two? Again, if there were rightly only two orders—presbyters and deacons, Bishops and presbyters being, as is said, only two names for the same office, how came the whole Christian body tamely and quietly to submit to what would in that case be the gross and unwarranted assumption of peculiar powers, by an order calling themselves Bishops in a new and unauthorized sense, and arrogating to themselves the functions of government and discipline; of conferring spiritual gifts, of making, deposing, or suspending priests and deacons? Now, brethren, let us dwell a little on this point. Can we imagine for a moment that the whole body of presbyters would, without a murmur, nay, without loud remonstrance, submit to authority thus unjustly claimed by certain of their own equals? Or can we imagine that there would be in all the literary productions of the very times in which this usurpation must have come in (if it ever came in) not one solitary word of remonstrance? Surely we are bound to suppose that men whose whole life was a testimony to Truth, and who valued life so little in comparison with the defence of Truth as to suffer tortures and death in maintaining it, could not possibly be parties to a conspiracy not only against themselves, but (what would weigh with such men far more) against the Truth as they had received it in Christ Jesus. Here then are the difficulties which meet the opponents of the three-fold orders of the Church; they must account for the universality of the three orders at a very early time, even within the first century; they must show just when the supposed usurpation of power by bishops came in; and in doing so they must explain how it happens that there is no