

practice having existed in the apostolic churches ordinarily and *prima facie* imposes an obligation upon all churches to adopt it." That word "ordinarily," however, leaves a loophole, the question how large being *sub judice*. And it is well, for, strange to say, the very first and most obvious practice of the apostolic church has been by common consent continually ignored, viz., Acts ii. 44, 45. In this case the selfish instincts of man have aided his sanctified common sense to understand that the letter killeth, the spirit giveth life.

The Bampton lectures of 1880, on the organization of the early Christian Churches, embodying in convenient form the results of large and candid enquiry, may be held as containing convincing proof that the earliest churches were left free to organize as the Spirit of Christ, which was among them, required, for the steady preaching, according to ever-varying circumstances, the gospel of His kingdom.

3. Are we left at sea, rudderless? chartless? I do not quote Pope as an ecclesiastical authority, but Scripture is true even on the devil's lips; and Pope has suggested³ in convenient form a truth to which I would now lead:

"For forms of government let fools contest;
Whate'er is best administered is best.
For modes of faith let graceless zealots fight;
He can't be wrong whose life is in the right.
In faith and hope the world will disagree,
But all mankind's concern is charity.
All must be false that thwarts this one great end;
And all of God that bless mankind or mend."

More tersely still the Scripture, "By their fruits ye shall know them," which leads me to what I deem by far the more important teaching from the text chosen, viz., that the assembly of the living God gains its true form and power from being the pillar and stay of the truth, and our previous argument only serves our purpose as it clears away ecclesiastical cobwebs and leads us to this most vital proposition. No form of godliness lacking the power can for a moment stand the presence (*parousia*) of Him who hath the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. When a philosopher would test a telescope, he seeks to resolve a nebulae or divide a double star; when a microscope, by trying its power upon some finely-marked lines, e.g. a podura scale. When Christ would try His Church, He judges by their works, trying the motives and estimating accordingly.

In what direction is the enquirer for truth to be pointed? The Church—I use the word now ecclesiastically—has busied itself with "doctrine" when it has not ragged about polity. This for eighteen centuries, and yet are the five points any nearer settlement to-day than when Dort held its synod thereon? Is Christendom any nearer to the truth of the procession of the Holy Spirit than when the *filioque* was surreptitiously added to the Latin form

of the eastern creed? Has the world heard the end of controversy regarding the millennium? or the last word intelligently as to the final destiny of the wicked? And is it the characteristic of the pillar and ground of truth to be "ever learning and never able to come to a knowledge of the truth?" I am not asking these questions in a querulous temper, nor seeking to entangle earnest minds still further in wandering mazes; but the cry comes from a heart which feels deeply for the multitudes as they cry for bread who would fain be filled with the husks of controversy, and yet their famine pangs remain unsatisfied.

There is work being done; there are true Christian assemblies forming parts of the great congregation and assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven. The hungry are being fed, the orphans visited, the widow comforted, *for Christ's sake*; there are cups of cold water given in the name of a disciple, the lambs are being folded, and glad tidings to the poor are preached. But, for the most part, that most truly Christ-like work is being done by those who know little of Thomas Aquinas, to whom Nice and Dort are nothing more than places on the map, if they are even that, and who have never reasoned out the decrees of God save as in work and endurance they have prayed, "Thy will be done." I am in these utterances by no means deprecating scholarship, nor belittling accurate research. The man who can patiently watch for the fourth of a lifetime the earthworm as a creature of God, that he may accurately set forth its workings, is certainly nearer the throne of worship than he who adds field to field and fortune to fortune by oppressing the hireling in his wages, the widow and the fatherless; and the midnight thinker grappling with the problem of the Infinite nearer of kin to the psalmist that with adoration surveyed the work of God's fingers, than the shallow brain babbler that understands neither what he says nor whereof he affirms. Indeed we might say more. All searchers for truth, whether by the footprints on the rocks, or by the echoes of Eternity however faint that whisper in the soul, are not unrecognized by Him who is not very far from every one of us, and that the assembly of the living God, so far from excommunicating or repelling such, should sustain and strengthen, that the way, the truth, and the life may be found. If truth is to be built up in the soul of man, the Kingdom of Heaven established "within you," the true Church should sustain the faith that is weak, not break the bruised reed and lay itself open to the charge implicitly made in a sentence from *Sartor Resartus*: "In these distracted times, when the religious principle, driven out of most churches, either lies unseen in the hearts of good men, looking and longing and silently working there toward some