

The Apostolic Age.

NO. IV.

BY D. A. STEELE, D. D.

THE QUESTION OF ORGANIZATION.

While reading these pages, the simplicity of the early church form is constantly suggested. "Organization" in our modern sense, there was none. As needs arose, they were met. Let us think a moment, and this will be made plain. When our Lord bade farewell to his sorrowing disciples, there were no meeting places, other than an upper-room; no presidents of congregations, or elders; no deacons; no church treasurers or clerks; no committees; no board of trustees; no presbyteries, or synods, or associations, or conventions, or any bodies, to which the local assembly might report or appeal. Indeed the body we call the "church" had as yet no visible manifestations, no concrete form. The embodiment of the believers in Jesus was left largely to themselves. As the needs arose they were met by the common sense of the Apostles, guided by the Holy Spirit. "It seems good to the Holy Ghost and to us," so runs the formula of authority to do certain things. Ever since the first days, the accretions have been growing, until Christianity has become loaded down. Take away from us all that is not of the New Testament, and what have we left? To begin at the beginning: A man was converted, or to speak by the Book, he believed. How long was he kept waiting before he was baptized? Who voted him into the church? Who gave him the right hand of fellowship, and an address of welcome? We have only to scan the record to show us that there are additions made at various times, some of them being of comparatively recent introduction. Sometimes, a pastor has been held guilty of violating a law, who has baptized a candidate before the vote of the church was taken, and deacons and others have shown over-anxiety when a member has not received the hand of fellowship, as if something essential had been omitted. The truth is that the Kingdom of God, as presented in the New Testament, is on a few simple lines. The gospel was preached by an Apostle, or an overseer or elder, or an evangelist or a deacon, and most likely, by men who held no official rank at all: "They that were scattered on the persecution that arose about Stephen, went everywhere preaching the word." Men and women, repented of their sins, believed in Christ as their Saviour, and thereupon were baptized—the same hour, without any reference to the assembled Christians. That baptism made these members of Christ and members one of another. They were baptized into Christ and into one body. Rom. 6:3; 1 Cor. 12:12, 13. If there was any formal welcome into the church, it is singular that nothing is said of it. It is certain that there is no mention of that grave process of later and more formal days, when "the candidate" must come before a body of office-bearers, or before the whole church, to relate his experience, to ask their judgment in the matter and to leave himself to their suffrages. We have grown so accustomed to this procedure, that it seems impertinent to call it in question; but our object is simply to call attention to the extreme simplicity of the New Testament organization, and we could not well do this, without contrasting the methods of the present time.

THE OFFICIALS OF THE CHURCHES.

"The Apostolic Age," presses an assumption, that "there were no regular officials in charge of the church in Jerusalem, during the period covered by the Book of the Acts, and that the precedence of both James and the elder brethren was natural only, not official." Dr. McGiffert's position is this:

"The elders or presbyters in the period with which we are dealing, were not officers in any sense. They were not men appointed for any service, they were simply the older and more mature disciples, naturally honored by their younger and less experienced brethren, but holding no official position of any kind." We have marked in italics the statement we cannot agree with. The author presses his theory further by insisting that "there were no regular officials in charge of the church at Jerusalem during the period covered by the Book of the Acts, and that the precedence both of James and the elder brethren was natural only not official." The same assumption is held when speaking of the elders of the church at Ephesus. Now, if there is any plain statement that these were official pastors on that day, it is found in the address of Paul at Miletus (Acts 20). He sent for the elders of the church at Ephesus and addressed them as "overseers" or "bishops"; specifically, "over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers." Their duties are defined; they are "to feed the flock," to perform the functions of shepherds. If we turn back to the 14th chapter we find that Paul and Barnabas "appointed elders in every church" before they left them. Titus was left in Crete that, among other things, he might appoint elders in every city. The qualifications for this are set forth (Titus 1:6-9) and so minutely that we cannot escape the conclusion that the individual pointed out must hold an official position. We notice also that here again as in the address of Paul, the elder and the bishop seem to be one. "For the bishop must be blameless," etc. This brings up a whole world of controversy. Who and what were "bishops"? Was every elder a

bishop? or is Dr. McGiffert's surmise correct that "though all bishops were elders, because chosen from the more mature and experienced brethren, not all elders were bishops by any means?" In support of this, reference is made to Phil. 1:1 and 1 Tim. 3, where the bishops and deacons seem to be the foremost men; and our author, in a discriminating note on pp. 663-4, gives more clearly his view: "Titus was not directed to appoint men to the office of elder, but to appoint elders to office; that is as verse 7 indicates, to the office of bishop. And so the author of the Acts did not mean that Paul and Barnabas made men elders,—they were elders already,—but that they made officers out of elders, i. e., appointed certain of the elder brethren to official position in the churches which they planted." We do not see this to be a solution of the problem, and think it defining to little purpose. Still, as the whole subject is being considered anew, we place these suggestions before our readers for what they are worth. The bishop does not assume a higher position than elder, in the New Testament. It is not until the next age that he is brought into prominence. But even then, it is not the grave character we have been led to connect with the name. The "bishop" is the president of the district, or the chief pastor of the town churches; and a good, humble, hard-worked brother, as such bishops usually are. Whether he had any of the authority of the modern episcopate is an open question. But we admit that in the next century, the bishop comes more and more into prominence, and gradually, from being head of a single church, or to speak strictly, one of the rulers of a local church, gathers to his office, and absorbs in himself those functions always ascribed to leadership. The question for us is, what stress is to be laid upon sub-apostolic developments. Must we be bound by what we find in the New Testament, or are we at liberty to make new provisions as needs arise? This question is not to be answered by a "Yes" or "No." If we say that we do not find everything in the New Testament, and therefore are at liberty to make provisions for ourselves, we, by that admission, place ourselves by the side of those bodies which have made to themselves offices and ordinances according to expediency. If, on the contrary, we take the old Baptist ground, that we are to go by the pattern set before us in the new covenant, what becomes of the additions we find in our own polity? In other words, would it be any more an inconsistency in us to have the mediating power of a bishop, or of a presbytery, or of a conference, than to have the other addenda above mentioned, and piled above these Missionary Boards, male and female, Sunday Schools, young peoples' societies, recreation committees, and all the various parts of the machinery of the modern Baptists? Is there inconsistency in our position, or is everything straight, and according to the pattern shown in the Mount?

A WORD OF COMMENDATION.

We have freely dealt with the Book, and have pointed out wherein we conceive the author is unnecessarily radical. We beg to say, in concluding our imperfect survey of its contents, that, while it is a disciple's free criticism of the hour—it is the day of calling in question everything, and of bringing all things to the tombstone—still it is valuable for its well-digested information. It is a clear, close, vigorous study of the methods and doctrines of the apostolic age. In this respect it is an example of honest work to all of us. We have a plentiful supply of catch-words, cries and texts to suit our purpose, but who collects the whole? What is the cause of it all? The present generation is not tolerant of dogma, nor are they patient with tradition. Their main insistence is on the facts of the case. What did Jesus say and mean? and how did the disciples understand Him? In pursuing this method, we need only to be careful, reverent and teachable. We must keep our eye to the new setting of truth, and we must have a care that no part of the truth is depreciated or pushed out of sight. Let us have it all.

The book is well printed and is characterized by that thoroughness for which the House of Scribner's is known everywhere.

"I Am So Hungry."

BY REV. S. A. DYKE.

Such was the reply of an earnest Christian woman to one who noticed, with no little surprise, that she had come through all weathers to a series of Bible readings, which were held at some distance from her home. The one who conducted these readings had much in himself, personally, which was not attractive to a person of education or refinement. The speaker was both educated and refined. Though young, she had passed through deep waters of bereavement and sorrow. She was bearing heavy burdens of responsibility, and she had learned how unsatisfying to the soul in its extremity are mere earthly things. Though the Bible reader intruded himself, his experiences and his interests needlessly and offensively, he nevertheless brought out things new and old from the treasury of God's word in a striking and impressive way; and it was for the sake of the bread of life which he dispensed that she endured the offensive ways of the one who dispensed it. Had he been wiser

and more winning in his methods, had he kept himself as a servant should, in the background his ministry would have been wider and richer. Hence when the question was put, "Why do you come so regularly, and at so much inconvenience?" her answer was, "I am so hungry!" There was a pathos and a yearning in her words, and such an earnest look in the sad, pale face that the face and the words bannt the writer still.

A little window sometimes lets in a lot of light, and in the light of that face and of those words he sees an image of a multitude of souls hungry for the bread of life, some of whom, perhaps, do not know what they want, or where it may be found. God has made man for himself, and man never can find satisfaction, lasting and full, until he returns to him, the One who is never satisfied with seeing; until he is filled with his life and love he is never satisfied with possessing. But when he turns with full purpose of heart to him then are the words of the Master true: "He that cometh to me shall never hunger; he that believeth on me shall never thirst."

But the question came again and again, "Why was she so hungry?" Was the bread of life not broken to her, or was it given in so scanty measure that she was starving still? Or was it, as it sometimes is with children, that a change of fare, and of the way in which it was served, had whetted her appetite? Much of the enjoyment of one's food depends upon the skill of the cook and the variety and the order of the viands which he brings to the table. Savory food will whet even a dull appetite, and a change in the order of the table will awaken interest in one to whom things have become somewhat monotonous, and sometimes one is helped by a change of cook and of diet. Nevertheless, careful observers have noted that the food of which we soonest tire is that which is most highly flavored; and that that of which we never weary has the least distinctive taste. Water, bread, meal, rice, meat, the more wholesome they are, the less distinctive flavor they possess. So a highly spiced and flavored ministry is not likely to be either wholesome or lasting; and frequently that becomes nauseating which, like honey, was received at first with avidity. It may draw for a time, but only for a time and men will weary of it soon. That ministry is ever most lasting which is simplest, plainest, clearest, and that stands truest to those substantial, fundamental truths of the word, upon which alone a strong and sturdy Christian character can be nourished.

But again the question comes: Why are souls so hungry and why so often tempted to wander far afield for food? No doubt there are many who have itching ears, and care only for novelty and excitement; and, perhaps, the time has come when many "will not endure sound doctrine but after their own lusts heap to themselves leaders." But this is not so often true of God's children as to furnish a satisfactory answer. More frequently will it be found in the fact, that the food is adulterated to such a degree that its life and power are taken away. It is so diluted with politics, science, art, philosophy, sociology, literature and criticism that the lingering soul cries out, "They have taken away my Lord and I know not where they have laid him." If they have not taken him away, they have buried him out of sight; or thrust him into an obscure corner. Then again the bread of life is often so refined that its most nourishing elements are eliminated. In the good old days, before the demand for the most delicate brands of flour, and the whitest loaves of bread, the phosphates, the brain and nerve and bone nourishing elements, were left in the flour. But now, by the new-fangled roller process, the bran and shorts are crushed off and cast out while men grow lean, and women with starved nerves go to the chemists for neuralgia remedies. And all go to the dentists for artificial masticators and ornaments.

Far too often is it that nourishing strength is sacrificed to delicate refinements and exquisite presentations of truth, while the soul is robbed of the life-sustaining, vigor-imparting, elements in the Word of God. Not infrequently one has gone from some vigorous work, with a sturdy appetite, to take a "meal," good old Saxon word, reminding one of the hand-ground corn of our forefathers, as a guest in some friendly home, only to find spotless linen and exquisite china, shining silver and fragrant flowers; beautiful cakes and custards and confections, on a table surrounded by delicate, pale-faced, feebly nourished children, and not a thing for one with a manly appetite. From such a "dainty" table one turns, as soon as good manners will permit, and hies himself to his own plain board, to his own good wife, who spreads before him the good roast beef and the good graham loaf, and he eats and is satisfied. A hungry soul cannot be fed on flowers of rhetoric, or dainty figures of speech, nor on lawn sleeves or spotless collars and cuffs, and faultless elocution. This may satisfy the worldly throng, with no spiritual appetite, and no thought above "society" functions; the less spiritual the food which is offered to them, the better they like the sermon. But to a hungry soul, the first thing is food, the second thing is food, and the third thing is food, and plenty of it, hot from the fire, and savory withal. After he has eaten and is satisfied he may turn to examine the linen and the dishes, and even to criticize the servant who has crossed

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