

From the Gospel Messenger.

"THE OLD PATHS;"*

OR, THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH.

By G. Boyd.

"Thus saith the Lord: Stand ye in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths; where is the good way and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls."—Jer. vi. 16.

"Ex ipso ordine manifestatur, id esse Dominicum et verum quod sit prius traditum: id autem extraneum et falsum quod sit posterius immissum."

Tertullian.

"Christians, in all ages, are bound to make the apostolic order of the Church, with respect to the Ministry, as well as other points, the model, as far as possible, of all their ecclesiastical arrangements."

Dr. Miller.

VII. The importance of the question being admitted, where is the Church of Jesus Christ, which he instituted, and with which he would have all who come unto him for salvation, to preserve fellowship? The inquiry returns upon us: how shall a penitent believer ascertain which is that Church? The most natural mode that would suggest itself to his mind would be to inform himself as far as practicable, of the different religious societies which are in the world, with the view of ascertaining which of them, if either, is that society which Christ formed. If it is to be found, that is the society to which he would of course connect himself.

In looking about him, perhaps the first religious communion which would present itself, would be the Presbyterian; one of the largest in this country (where for all practical purposes we must suppose the investigation to be going on,) one of the most zealous, too, embodying a great deal of talent and influence, and having multitudes of pious members. Here, our enquirer would say, is a very respectable body of Christians. When did it rise? Has it been from the apostles' time? In answer, he would be told: that John Calvin, the reformer, first established Presbyterianism, at Geneva, in the year of our Lord 1541, or as others say that this form of Church order was set up there by Farel and Viret, Calvin's predecessors, and afterwards adopted by him. This cannot be the primitive church.

His attention would next be turned to the Baptist denomination, which is larger than the Presbyterian, equally zealous, and embracing many of the excellent of the earth within its communion. Of this sect, Buck, in his Theological Dictionary, says, "although there were several Baptists among the Albigenses, Waldenses, and the followers of Wickliff, it does not appear that they were formed into any stability until the time of Menno, about the year 1563." About 1644 they began to make a considerable figure in England, and spread themselves into separate congregations. They separated from the Independents about the year 1638. This cannot be the Church of the Apostles.

Let us suppose that the attention of our inquirer is next turned to the Methodist society. As large, it is not larger than the Baptist, and having had in its ministry and service many of the most devoted men. If he was a man of ardent feelings, and lively imagination, he would be very likely to be attracted by fervor which is exhibited in the devotional exercises of this body of christians.

Upon asking, is this the original church of the Lord Jesus Christ? He would be surprised to learn that this denomination is only a little more than a century old. He would be told, (for history must tell the truth,) that the Methodist society was founded at Oxford, in England, in the year 1729. That it is a secession from the Church of England, at first claiming to be a society within that Church, and disclaiming all intention of setting up a separate order or ministry: subsequently extending its pretensions, until at last it calls itself in the United States, "the Methodist Episcopal Church," but without Episcopal orders, or succession. He would find in this society many excellent men and women, fully persuaded in their own minds, that they are professing Christ, and serving God according to the divine will. He would

also notice a commendable simplicity prevailing among this interesting people, worthy of all imitation. But his search being after the apostolic Church of Jesus Christ, he would be compelled to go further.

Let us imagine, that he is next led to consider the claims of the "Society of Friends." Who tell us themselves, "that in the 17th century, a number of men, dissatisfied with all the modes of religious worship, then known in the world, withdrew from the communion of every visible church, to seek the Lord in retirement." Among these was their "Honorable Elder" George Fox, "who being quickened by the immediate touches of divine love, could not satisfy his apprehensions of duty to God, without directing the people where to find the like consolation and instruction." In this most remarkable society, designed to be purely spiritual, which considers all forms and order, obstructions to the pure worship of God; and calculated to divert the attention of the mind from that secret influence by which they may be "gathered into a composed awful frame of mind, and enabled to worship in solemn silence;" our inquirer would find much that is "lovely and of good report" in manners, and a "faithful testimony" against many things which are unholy in practice: but he would look in vain for those marks by which he could identify the "Friends' Society," with the divinely constituted church of Jesus Christ.

Thus we may suppose a person to go round the circle of Protestant Christian denominations and doubtless he would regard it as a remarkable fact, that no one of them can trace itself up in an organized form beyond the time of the "reformation," except the EPISCOPALIAN.* This denomination we have seen from "Scripture and ancient authors" has the "form and order" given, to the Church at first by Jesus Christ and his apostles.

At first, all the Churches, which were but parts of one "Catholic" whole, were thus constituted, as was the Church of Jerusalem, such was the Church at Antioch; and as was the Church at Antioch, such was the Church at Ephesus, such was the Church at Rome; and as was the Church at Rome such was the Church at Carthage; and such were all the early Churches. The whole tenor of ancient ecclesiastical history is, that, as a general rule, without a Bishop there was no Church.

IV. PROPOSITION.

In my concluding proposition, I will undertake to prove that the Protestant Episcopal Church is identically the same Church as the apostolic, and has been continued in a direct and regular succession from the time of the apostles to the present day.

I By the quotations which I selected from the apostolic Fathers, Clemens, Polycarp, and Ignatius, in proof of my second proposition, it was clearly shown, I think, (if their testimony be admitted) that the original form of the Church was Episcopal.

I will now proceed to show from the same kind of testimony that the Church so organized has been actually perpetuated in the same form, by a regular succession of its bishops or chief pastors. This position might be assumed after what has been said; for if the church which was founded by divine authority, and according to a divine form, has been changed, it evidently has ceased to be the same Church. For the satisfaction, however, of all who desire information upon the subject, I will bring forward a portion of the endless testimony which antiquity affords upon this subject.

i. The first witness to whom I shall refer is IRENEUS, bishop of Lyons in ancient Gaul, now France. He was a disciple of St. Polycarp, and sent by him to preach the gospel among the Gauls. He wrote five books against the heretics, which are dated A. D. 170. After a devoted life he suffered martyrdom.

Irenæus says, "we can enumerate those who were appointed by the apostles bishops in the Churches, and their successors, even to us, who have taught us such things" (alluding to a certain heresy.) For they wished those to be very perfect and irreprehensible in all things, whom they left their successors, delivering to them their own place of governors, who acting correctly, great benefit would arise, but the greatest calamity if they should fall away."—Concerning the

Church at Rome, Irenæus says—The blessed apostles, therefore, founding and instructing the Church, delivered to Linus the bishoprick to govern this Church. Paul makes mention of this Linus in the epistle which are to Timothy. To him succeeded Anacletus. After him in the third place from the apostles, Clement obtained the bishoprick, who both saw the apostles themselves and conferred with them, when as yet he had the apostles sounding in his ears, and their traditions before his eyes. To this Clement succeeded Evaristus; and to Evaristus, Alexander, and then Sixtus was appointed, the sixth from the Apostles; after him Telesphorus, who likewise suffered martyrdom most gloriously; and then Hyginus; then Pius; after whom Annicetus; and when also Soter had succeeded Annicetus, now Eleutherus has the bishoprick in the twelfth place from the apostles. By this ordination and succession, that tradition in the Church, which is from the apostles, and the doctrine of the truth hath come even unto us.

From this witness we learn

1. That the apostles appointed bishops in all the Churches.
2. That there was a regular succession of bishops in the churches.
3. That the government of the Churches, was devolved upon the bishops by the apostles.
4. The second witness is Tertullian, a presbyter of the church of Carthage, who wrote about 30 years after Irenæus, A. D. 200.

Speaking of heresies, Tertullian says, "But if any man dare to mingle themselves with the apostolic age, that thus they may appear to be handed down from the apostles, because they were under the apostles, we can say: let them produce the origin of their churches, let them declare the series of their bishops, so running down from the beginning by succession, that the first bishop may have some one of the apostles, (or apostolic men, who yet continued constant with the apostles) for their author and predecessor. For in this manner the apostolic churches trace their origin; as the church of the Smyrneans having Polycarp, relates that he was placed with them by John. As the church of the Romans tells us of Clement, ordained by Peter: in like manner also the rest of them show that they have grafts of the apostolic seed who were appointed to the bishoprick by the apostles. Let the heretics do any thing like this."

Another short quotation to the same import: "We have churches, the foster children of John. For if Marcion denies his revelation, nevertheless the succession of bishops rehearsed to the beginning, will stand in John their author.—Thus likewise the excellence of the rest is recognized."

iii. The third witness is Cyprian, who was ordained by the bishop of Carthage, A. D. 248, and suffered martyrdom under the emperor Valerian.

After quoting our Lord's words to Peter.—"Thou art Peter, and upon this rock will I build my church." He remarks, "From thence through the changes of and succession, the ordination of bishops, and the government of the church have descended: so that the church is built upon the bishops, and every act of the church is governed by these presidents." Again he says, "Yea, it is not a matter left to our free choice whether bishops shall rule or no, but the will of our Lord and Saviour is, that every act of the church should be governed by the bishops." Again, "The Church is a people joined to their priests, (i. e. chief minister or bishop) and a flock adhering to their shepherd—Whence you ought to know that the bishop is in the church, and the church is in the bishop; and if there be any one who is not with the bishop, he is not in the church."

That bishops, and not presbyters are here meant, is evident from what Cornelius, the cotemporary of Cyprian, and Bishop of Rome, says in reference to Novatian; who had surreptitiously procured himself to be ordained a bishop, in hope of creating a schism and gaining a party in the church. "Was this vindicator of the gospel ignorant (says Cornelius) that there ought to be but one bishop in a Catholic church (meaning Rome) in which it was not unknown to him, that there were forty-six presbyters, seven deacons," &c.

iv. The fourth and last witness which I shall introduce, is the ecclesiastical historian, Eusebius, a native of Palestine, who was bishop of Cæsarea A. D. 314,

* Continued from our last number.

* Of course all the Episcopal Churches are included.