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"WISDOM IS THE PRINCIPAL THING; THEREFORE GET WISDOM."

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## WESLEYAN TRACTS FOR THE TIMES, No. 3.

### APOSTOLICAL SUCCESSION: A SUMMARY OF OBJECTIONS TO THE MODERN CLAIM.

(Concluded.)

Various facts of Church History, appear singularly adverse to the theory of "uninterrupted succession."—Let us briefly refer to the relation in which it places the British Churches. We know not that our shores were ever visited by an Apostle; but we are informed that, at the close of the sixth century,—when the British Christians had taken refuge in the mountains of Wales,—a Romish Missionary came to proselyte the invading tenants of our country, our Saxon ancestors. Thus we are entangled in an alliance with the seven hills. The weight of this consideration is felt by some who, nevertheless, cherish the "succession;" and these parties, anxious to be free from Romish contamination, suppose various branches of the sacred appointment. But this is only an ingenious supposition. Under the circumstances, we fear that we must allow the course of the stream through Rome.

And can it be denied that the stream, flowing in such a channel, has been as turbid as sin and Satan could make it? These pages shall not be disgraced by records which we would rather consign to perpetual forgetfulness. It is sufficient to say, that the history of fallen man has furnished no passages more painful, more humbling, than those which occur in the lives of the Popes and Bishops with whom our contemporaries are claiming kindred. We will not quote, even from Popish historians; though many extracts, which might be here introduced, would serve the useful purpose of establishing the total degeneracy of human nature. Of this affecting doctrine the frightful evidence may be drawn from the book of the Church, and the biography of men who have, in "succession" or in malignant rivalry, arrogated the title of Christ's Vicars.

But, when it is pleaded that the Holy Spirit was given to such men, not for personal sanctification, but for the efficiency of their public offices,—we ask, How then have they not been preserved, in all instances, from heresy? and how is Rome to be even now condemned?

The dilemma of rival Bishops offers no small difficulty. How shall we be certified, that the true successor of the Apostles has always obtained the mitre? It may be said that a Council is authorised to decide among the contending parties; but our learned opponents will not deny that a Pontiff has been deposed by a Council, and yet, historically retained in the line. And where was the "uninterrupted succession," when a Council deposed both or all the rivals?—Where, during the period of eighty years, in which, according to Bellarmine, the church, for want of a lawful Pope, had no other head than what is in heaven?

Ancient heretical Bishops, returning to the catholic or orthodox communion, were permitted to retain their rank without reconsecration; and recanting Clergy, who had been ordained by heretical Bishops, were also received.

Again. Every one who has read the history of the middle ages, knows the arts that were often successfully practiced for the obtaining of the Pontificate. Some of the Popes were appointed by reputed heretics and schismatics. And, though the ancient ecclesiastical canons require three bishops to be engaged in the consecration of an Archbishop, the successors of St. Peter have been elected sometimes by the People, sometimes by the Clergy, sometimes by the Emperor, and sometimes by the Cardinals alone. Aias for the modern claim, the vindication of which requires proof of regular and uniform induction in all these cases?

Again. The ancient canons allow that a Bishop's ordination may be annulled; some of the occasions being simony, heresy,

and immorality. He who derives his comfort from the notion of unbroken "succession," must therefore confute the testimonies of those historians, up to this moment deemed authentic, who say that in some ages simony and other evils were universally practised. He has the equally arduous task of dismissing the reasonable apprehension, that schismatical Bishops have more than once confirmed the boasted name.

These difficulties are not now suggested for the first time; nor are they imagined to serve an immediate purpose. Their weight has been felt by candid men of various parties. In favour of our own view it would not be difficult to show a "CATECHA PAROUS," not less revered than either whose given in the Oxford Tracts. But our CHAIRS would be found the Rector, or of blessed memory, for we have not yet learned to abhor and anathematize the name of PROTESTANT. These enlightened and holy men were not careful to show this, just until their time, Romish orders were valid. They never vindicated their succession by trifling subtilties. They summoned Rome to the bar of truth and reason, unveiled her enormous guilt; and gave an irrevocable verdict against "the woman drunken with the blood of the saints," "the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth." We fearlessly affirm their judgment, and thus disclaim all sympathy with some moderns, who feed in the pastures of Protestantism, and yet unblushingly defend the church of Rome as a true church. A cherished theory alienates them to the depraved communion which denies the Scriptures to her lady,—which prescribes for her clergy the blasphemy of forgiving sins,—which is ever ready to shed rivers of innocent blood; and they, who refuse the right hand of fellowship to the various Protestant churches, recede not at the thought of such an alliance. But, with solemn deliberation, and in the fear of God, we recede our resolution never to admit the relation to Rome, never to honour her as "our beloved sister in captivity," or as "the mother of our new birth," and never to ascribe the validity of the modern ministry to the ordination bestowed by her Pontiffs and Bishops on her Protestant Fathers.

The doctrines of "uninterrupted succession" and exclusive orders, now revived with the most imposing show of earnestness, are essentially Popish. In this light they were undoubtedly regarded by the earlier Protestants. An Elizabethan statute admitted the validity of the ordination of Scotch and other Reformed Churches, and allowed their divines to officiate in the Church of England. Dark, in the estimation of the Oxford Tractists, was the day on which such an admission was made. But we believe with joy that, in the present critical times, the English Church includes many thousands who are baptized with the same spirit of charity and liberality that was displayed in the dawn of the Reformation.—Among the living Clergy there is a remarkable division of opinion on the "succession." The men ordained by the same Bishops, instructed at the same college, and invested with the same powers, are here utterly disunited. But how are the recusants treated by the Oxford writers? What effort is made to enlighten those who are so strangely unacquainted with their own prerogative? Let the Presbyterian who leads on the "Anglo-Catholics" reply. After asserting APOSTOLICAL DESCENT according to the view of his school, he says to his fellow-Presbyter,— "Now every one of us believes this. I know that some will at first deny they do; still they do believe it. Only, it is not sufficiently practically impressed on their minds. They do believe it; for it is the doctrine of the Ordination Service, which they have recognized as truth in the most solemn season of their lives." Still greater boldness is apparent in the selec-

tion of a motto, prefixed to the "CATECHA." "The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men? And they reasoned among themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will then say unto us, Why did ye not then believe on him? But if we shall say, Of men; we fear the people, for all hold John as a prophet." Let the inquiry thus introduced be plainly offered. The Oxford doctrine of apostolical succession, "whence is it? from heaven, or of men?" And the answer will be instantly returned, not only by proscribed seceders from the Established Church, but also by a host of our best Clergy, and of her most learned Legataries.—"OF MEN." The inquirer will soon have ample proof that, in whatever estimation the holy Baptist was held in the days of Christ, it is by no means true that "all hold" the Oxford Tractists of the nineteenth century "as prophets." These gentlemen seem, indeed, to assume more than prophetic discernment, for they profess to know the creed of their fellow-Preachers better than those Presbyters themselves. But let England, let Christendom, decide what parties are to be credited.—Hundreds of evangelical Clergymen, who deny the Oxford tenet, and find nothing like it in the Ordination Service,—who bear steady testimony against its revival, and tremble lest its misguided advocates should distract our Protestant Establishment and surrender the very citadel of truth; or a few mystics and academical dreamers, who, in order to give currency to their apocryphal dogma, had it convenient to allege that the dissent of their clerical brethren is, in truth, to be regarded as acquiescence!—The Clergy who resist this attempt to storn their very faith and conscience,—a noble band of witnesses,—will have the suffrages, and sympathies, the esteem, of all who think and feel aright. They do not despise antiquity, but their allegiance is reserved to Inspiration. They are willing to venerate many of the Fathers who flourished in the early Christian centuries, but to place none of them in the rank of the holy Apostles and Prophets. Wisely do they prefer Scripture to tradition, the spirit to the letter, the grace to the sign, the substance to the shadow. "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God."†

Once more. The Oxford Tractarians reject, as utterly decisive, "the notion that present palpable usefulness, productive results, acceptableness to" the "flock," "that these and such like are the tests of a Minister's "divine commission."‡ The correct view of this matter will be given in other Tracts of this Wesleyan Series. But we here protest against the implication of the passage just cited, and assert the value of "present palpable usefulness," of "productive results," and even of "acceptableness to" a spiritual "flock," as among the tokens of the divine sanction and blessing, condescendingly vouchsafed to thousands who are not included in the boasted "succession." The truth is told in a few words: Many of the Clergy wish to admit the Holy Spirit, but he proves himself inimitable. Who are the Tractarian Dames? Is it even pretended that souls are awakened and saved by their ministry? Are their followers distinguished by a cheerful and sanctifying piety? Is their deportment to all around them, to the ministers and members of other churches, graced by "lovely tempers?"

Let us speak freely in reference to the other side of the question. Who are excluded from the "succession?" Are not multitudes of the most zealous, the most enlightened, the most successful, among the Ministers of the age? And does not "the

Lord the Spirit" confirm their "word with signs following?" Are they not honoured with "epistles of commendation," to be "known and read of all men?" Of hundreds among them it may be further said, that unto them "it is given, in the behalf of Christ," and in obedience to His call, "to suffer for His sake." The story of their toils and sorrows furnishes the everlasting rebuke to their accusers. Constrained by the deepest convictions of a call from heaven, they have regularly accepted an office which they feel to be almost overwhelming, and they are humbly, but successfully, discharging its duties. While the Oxford Tract writers are enjoying the quiet of colloquy-shades, these true successors of Apostles are "in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren: in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness."\* Of themselves, indeed, they "will not glory;" every thing they can do and suffer is too mean an offering for their blessed Master. But in his hands they place their cause. Worn by unjust aspersions, they fly to His tribunal and, until the supreme day, which they expect with humble joy, they "glory in" their "infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon" them. Yes, they "take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake; for when" they are "weak, then" are they "strong."†

Among the MISCELLANEOUS OBJECTIONS to the Oxford tenet, we may place the following:

1. Its utter worthlessness, when viewed in respect to practical and spiritual results. We ask in vain for the evidence,—we are strongly inclined to deny the possibility,—of its usefulness in a single instance.—And yet it is frequently substituted for the matchless theme of "Christ crucified."—The Clergy cannot plead, in defence, the example of St. Paul: he vindicated himself when he was aspersed, and when his apostleship was denied. But the orders of the pious Clergy are not questioned; no one quarrels with them on the subject. But, not content with the unmolested enjoyment of their own functions and honours, many of them eagerly deny the ministerial name to all beside: "To their valueless theory we are unwilling to offer the slightest homage: and therefore we scorn the attempt to show that we are in the "uninterrupted succession," though it requires little ingenuity to produce a pleading as specious as theirs. The powerless thunders of their wrath will never fright the intelligent Christian, the fascinations of their mystic theology will never charm him. He will persist in asking the proofs of practical utility, before he accepts their system. And,—while junior Clergy consign men who are patriarchs in age, and apostles in zeal, to the abyss that swallowed up the host of Korah,—he will counsel these young gentlemen to read consecutively the sacred history, that they may at length catch some portions of the spirit of gentle Moses, who, when one was eager to check the alleged boldness and irregularity of Eidad and Medad, replied, "Enviest thou for my sake? Would God that all the Lord's people were Prophets, and that the Lord would put his spirit upon them!"‡

Let no lover of God and man charge us with rashness or severity, when we express our indignation on account of the manner in which "the apostolical succession," and the allied opinions, have been made the subjects of pulpit-address. Of all the Oxford Tracts, none is to our minds more affecting than that which bears the title, "Heads of a Week-day Lecture, delivered to a Com-

\* Rev. xlvii. 3. † XIII. Elizabeth, ch. viii. ‡ Oxford Tracts, No. 1.

\* Oxford Tracts, No. 74. † Matt. xlii. 21. ‡ Col. ii. 15, 16. § Oxford Tracts, No. 1.

† 2 Cor. xii. 27. ‡ 2 Cor. xii. 2, 3, 10. § 2 Cor. xii. 21-22.