

THE APOSTOLIC SUCCESSION.

By the late Dr. McIlwaine (Evangelical) Bishop of Ohio.

In regard to that particular line of descent, by which the authority to ordain has been handed down from age to age—the line of succession—I shall go no farther in this discourse than to state, without argument, the doctrine of the Church with which we are connected.

That it is the doctrine of our Church, that the line of succession has been through a ministry consisting of three orders, and through the highest order of the three, the Bishops of the Church, needs no illustration. But what is the doctrine as to the nature of the evidence on which the belief of that succession is built? Does she decidedly rest it upon the Word of inspiration? What stress does she lay upon that succession, as to the lawfulness of a ministry that cannot claim it? And how far does she expect the opinions of her ministers to be conformed in this matter? These questions may be briefly answered:—

As to imparity, or in other words, "divers orders of ministers," the doctrine of the Church is, that this feature of the ministry is of *divine appointment*. You need no stronger evidence of this than the declaration, in so many words, contained in the collect in the Office for the Ordination of Priests:—"Almighty God, Who by Thy Holy Spirit hast appointed divers orders of ministers in Thy Church." This declaration the Church has taken pains to insert also in the collect for the ordination of deacons, and in the Office for the Consecration of Bishops; of course expecting her ministers to join heartily in those prayers and so express their belief. Then as to when this imparity began, and on what evidence the belief of it is based, the Preface to the Office for the Ordination of Deacons, speaks explicitly:—"It is evident unto all men, diligently reading Holy Scriptures and Ancient Authors, that from the Apostles' times there have been Three Orders of ministers in Christ's Church—Bishops, Priests, and Deacons."

From this declaration it is clearly the doctrine of the Church, that not only ancient authors, but the *Holy Scriptures* teach the *Apostolic origin* of an Episcopal Ministry, in the *three orders* just named. And since it is by none pretended, that there were of right, two descriptions of ministry in the Apostles' time, the one such as has been mentioned, the other of an essentially diverse kind, it is evidently the doctrine of the Church that from the Apostle's times, and by the evidence of Scripture, there was no other Ministry than that which subsisted under the several gradations of bishop, presbyter, and deacon.

And then in evidence of the great stress laid by the Church on the necessity of Episcopal ordination, the Preface to the Ordination Office proceeds:—"To the intent that these Orders should be continued and reverently used and esteemed in this Church, no man shall be accounted or taken to be a lawful Bishop, Priest, or Deacon in this Church, or suffered to execute any of the said functions, except he be called, tried, examined, and admitted thereto, according to the form hereafter following, or hath had Episcopal consecration or ordination." These words require no comment to make them plainer.

Thus far speaks the Church and no farther. How the belief of those views should affect our opinions as to the *validity* of any non-Episcopal orders; whether, *whilst we must consider them irregular*, because wanting Apostolic precedent, we should consider them also as in all respects *invalid*, the Church speaks not; but leaves the question for private judgment; and alike

nourishes in her bosom those who affirm and those who deny. This is wisdom. It is according to the procedure of the Church in all similar cases. There is room here for difference of opinion, and the Church leaves it to be occupied as each may be persuaded in his own mind. Such is the moderation displayed in her articles. I fully concur in a passage of one of the charges of the late venerable Bishop White, whose cautions to the Church have a long time to live, and are full of wisdom. Speaking of possible causes of disunion in the Church, he thus speaks: "In connection with a determination to sustain the Episcopate, it is not impossible that in the different grounds on which it may be rested by different advocates there may ensue a cause of disunion. We shall be safe in this matter, in proportion as we contend on the ground taken up for us by the reformers of the Church of England. They unequivocally affirmed the *Apostolic origin* of Episcopacy as a *fact*; and then as a suitable *consequence*, they ordained that there should be no other ministry within their bounds. The same is the limit within our Church. If any should carry the subject beyond this it is private judgment, and cannot be acted on in proceedings regulated by the rubrics and canons."

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According to this, as well as what was said before, when a candidate for Orders professes attachment to the doctrine as well as discipline and worship of the Protestant Episcopal Church, he is *considered as professing fully to believe in the Apostolic Origin of Episcopacy*—to believe also that such origin is *apparent from the Scriptures* as well as from ancient authors; and as a necessary consequence that Episcopacy is the *only form* of Church order contained in the Scriptures and manifest from ancient authors; and consequently whether a Church should be now Episcopal or not, is a question to be settled upon considerations, not of mere expediency, but of deference to the model of the Primitive Church, as it was constituted by the Apostles under the guidance of inspiration; so that no one ought to be accounted "a lawful minister in this Church, or suffered to execute any functions of the ministry, unless he hath had Episcopal ordination." But after this, precisely what is the legitimate inference from such premises as to the ministry of the Churches in which there is no Episcopal ordination, however this or that conclusion may seem to any person to be inevitable, the Church as a witness of the truth, deposes no further. The rest is for private judgment.

To turn now to our position. Wherever there is a *regularly authorized* ministry, its ordination is from *Christ*, and its calling is of *God*. It is just the continuance of that claim of communication, by which the Lord having first invested His Apostles with authority to ordain successors in the ministry, has through them *transmitted the same in unbroken descent*, through all ages, to the present, and will transmit it from hence to the end of the world.

"WHY I AM AN EPISCOPALIAN."

The following letter appeared in the *Lawsonian*, a secular paper of the State of Missouri, and is, we think, worthy of reproduction. He says the secular editor asked representatives of the different religious bodies to send in "reasons for their faith," and Mr. Mann sent the following:

I am a member of the Church (known in law in the U. S. as the Protestant Episcopal) on the same grounds that I am a Christian. The same reasoning which proves Christianity proves also the Church. That reasoning has two great divisions, *historic evidence* and *personal experience*.

The supernatural character and divine mis-

sion of Jesus Christ are to be learned from history, and history alone. It was to history He committed his religion. He lived His earthly life, He wrought His earthly work, He declared His message to souls, and then He withdrew in visible form from earth. But had this been all, only His own companions would have known of Him and His salvation. Therefore He committed to selected men the duty of making Him, His work, and His teaching known to the world, in other countries and in future years. "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you." "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." Such was the apostolic commission, which the apostles performed by establishing a society and by writing certain narratives and letters. The society was the Church; the writings were finally gathered together in the volume known as the New Testament. I accept both the Society and the Book. I believe both really come from Christ, that He meant both should exist, that they are His deliberately chosen way of making Himself known to men, that it was through His inspiration that the apostles arranged for the rites and sacraments and ministry of the Church, and told His life in the Gospels, and explained His teachings in the Epistles. I do not accept the society but reject the Book, nor do I accept the Book but reject the Society. I do not say we have the Church and can make our own Bible, nor do I say we have the Bible and can make our own Church.

I believe both the old Book and the old Society to be still on earth and still fitted for this work. I know, indeed, that both have been at times tampered with; that the book has been interpolated, that the society has been corrupted, that there have been gross misrepresentations of the Bible and vicious practices of the Church, but I do not believe either of them to have been ruined. Despite the fact that there have been apocryphal gospels and spurious epistles which gained a temporary and partial credence, I hold that we have in the New Testament the genuine works of the apostles and evangelists. Despite an occasional doubt as to the true reading, due to variations of manuscripts, which show the weakness of the human copyists; despite the controversies as to the real meaning of certain obscure passages, I take it that the text of the New Testament is, in all important respect quite trustworthy and not hard to be understood by honest-hearted men. I believe all this—why? Not because I have had a special revelation; not because nobody has questioned it; but because any fair research into the history of the past shows it to be true, because all the light thrown upon the eighteen centuries shows me these books in substantially the shape I behold them now. In many minor matters, of course, there have been changes. What I catch a glimpse of in the third century, for instance, is a roll of parchment with its contents written by the hand of a scribe, in Greek. What I see to-day is a rectangular bound book with its contents printed from metal types, in English. But essentially it is the same vision. From quotations in early writers, from occasional old manuscripts still in existence, from references made by opponents, from the witness borne by prevalent customs, in the first ages of Christianity, I learn what sort of a Bible was then received, and, behold, it is the same as that I have to-day. Now a precisely similar style of reasoning applies to the Church. Exactly the same testimony exists for her. We can find out what were the the main outlines, the fundamental principles, the distinguishing characteristics of the early Christian Church. We know what the creeds were, the sacraments, the officers in the ministry, the general mode of worship, the general tone of teaching. No man can bring me a proof that St. John wrote the gospel attributed to him, to which I cannot