

THE CHURCH CONGRESS.

Among the many interesting subjects discussed at the Southampton Congress was the evidence of Christian antiquity as to church ritual:—

The first paper was read by the Ven. Archdeacon Freeman, of the diocese of Exeter. He said the ritual of Apostolic days was a revelation which came down from heaven, and not only so, but in its grand leading features the observance of that ritual was as necessary to the scheme of salvation as the holding of sound doctrine and practice of holiness. (Loud cries of "No, no," and applause.) Those were qualifications for heaven, but if they asked for the medium of contact, the ladder of access between earth and heaven, they knew of no other than the ritual and sacramental ordinances of the Gospel as once for all instituted. They alone formally, as a matter of Divine order, knitted them up in the body of Christ, and held them to it. (Hear, hear.) While this was a solemnizing it was also a guiding consideration, putting them into the true attitude for discovering what they were in search of. It must always be good to tread softly, with veiled and downcast eyes, in searching holy ground. A brief but significant outline of early church ritual, was given them in the Acts of the Apostles, when the movement of the Spirit on the darkness of the church's sleep created a new thing out of that which was without form and void. The prayers of the upper chamber in Jerusalem had a wonderful effect in shaping and awakening the church to a new kind of life. What was the settled form of things which was in substance to abide to the end of the world? The Apostles continued steadfast in something. What was it? 1st, the Apostle's teaching and fellowship; 2nd, the breaking of bread; and, thirdly, the prayer, and to these might be added the continuing daily in the Temple, for the high service psalmody. In these they had a full statement in block or outline, of the Apostolic ritual. On any one of these four great elements of the ritual, the teaching the Holy Eucharist, the prayers, and the psalmody, they were furnished with some, though few details. Having shown in what way these were shown by the New Testament, he continued to say that an officiating vestment was possibly spoken of. (Loud laughter.) The context at large, and the earnestness of the whole passage seemed to countenance the supposition. (Renewed laughter.) The breaking of bread, consecrating prayers, using of lights with profusion, and in late Apostolic days the mystical numbers, seemed to testify to the ritual used, and there also seemed to be a concurrence of literary and monumental evidence in favour of some kind of head-dress having been worn by the Apostles. (Hear, hear.) On entering the sub-Apostolic age there was an orderly expansion and reduction to detail of these self-same features, the elements of psalmody and reading of the Holy Scriptures being fully conserved and developed on great Christian festivals. The great features of oblation, of a memorial sacrifice, of reception of mysterious and sacrificial food, of effectual pleading, were discernable in the post-Apostolic age downwards. In treating of the subject of vestments he said it seemed to be fairly established that a comely garment of a kind held to be fit for solemn occasions was used from very early times, and also that a vestment was put on, of more especial solemnity, at the point where the ordinary service merged into the more solemn Eucharistic ones. Yet "white" seemed to have been for a long time the only colour, fine linen the only material, except that a band, possibly coloured, but more commonly black, held exactly the position of their stole. The exact date or origin of the subsequently universal alb, stole, and chasuble was lost in obscurity; but the retention of the vestments, linen or silken, but white, with only so much addition of colour as the varying stole and orphreys involved, would nearly bring them into harmony with early times and the whole church. A distinctive dress for the Holy Communion they ought in any case to secure. (Loud applause.) What was the purpose of the whole of this ritual? Surely, by processes covering the whole of their being and needs, and pervading by solemn weekly recurrence their whole time, "to present every man faultless in Christ Jesus"—not, as they had too long allowed

themselves to drink, to give a filip three times a year, or once a month, to a languid religious circulation, to impart a month's provision of ritual meat. Having in no measured terms exclaimed against the administering of the Holy Eucharist but once a month, but stating rather that they should have weekly celebrations, the Ven. Archdeacon said the early church knew nothing about "new moons," that was monthly Eucharists, or of what he ventured to call "starved" Eucharists. The Eucharist, as it existed for 700 years, as it theoretically existed still, was a provision for the whole man, his understanding, his instinct of praise, his need of manifold intercession, and not merely his need of a deep mystery. But what was offered them now as the *acmé* of spiritual perfection and the proper instrument of it? An early and isolated act of oblation and reception, from which three grand features were excluded, namely, Scriptural teaching, praise and intercession were excluded by the utterly illegal deferring of the ordinary office to a later period in the day—he referred to the universal church in saying this. The grand rule ordained by Christ, and settled for ever in all its grand features by His Apostles, was thus reduced to one which, however lofty its worth as far as it goes, did provide for the whole man, but left three-fourths of his being uncared for, or thrust into a corner as of secondary moment. Looking at it in this light he knew not what to call the residuum but a "starved" Eucharist, such as could not rightly feed on the soul, and such as the early church never heard of. In other points, those calling themselves our leaders were leading us astray. The "unleavened bread" had a slight superficial appearance of fitness for Eucharistic purposes, but it was not that which the Lord commanded or the Apostle partook of. The nature of the ordinance which in the case of both elements elevated our common food and drink into a channel of spiritual benefits, added to the unwavering practice of the Eastern church, and the late origin of the dispute mentioned in *Neale's Eastern Church*, was inclusive in the point. Happily, amidst these divergences to the right and left, the course of duty and safety and peace lay open to them; the way, the *modus*, the path of observances steadily maintained by the Early and United Church of God. The "evidence of Christian antiquity as to church ritual" was not in the slightest degree doubtful or conflicting. Men might hear or they might forbear, but the trumpet gave out no uncertain sound. "Quod utique," quod est omnibus observatum," for 500 years, be this our "semper observandum. Ta archaia ethé prateiro." (Applause.)

The Right Rev. Chairman (the Bishop of Winchester) here rose and said up to that time they could trace that there had been amongst them in that large gathering of men who differed much upon many points, a remarkable spirit of peace and of mutual forbearance. (Hear, hear.) He thought, he trusted at least, that he might trace this to be the blessed presence and help of the Spirit of Peace. He felt that a great strain upon the patience of many in that room must result in the discussion of that morning: and in some of the manifestations during Archdeacon Freeman's speech he saw cause for some alarm as to the future of the discussion.

Mr. John Elliott, of Bassett, Southampton, followed with a paper, in which he said the question of ritual turned on the nature of God and the position of man in relation to his Maker. The object and effect of Christ's mission and work was to restore the family ideal lost by the fall. The united testimony of Christ and His sealed twelve is, that all caste distinctions were abolished, and the outward service of family worship substituted for the old sacerdotal ritual. He showed the practice of the primitive Christians, and said for full five hundred years the communion-table stood in the centre of the church, in the midst of the people. A sacerdotal caste and ritual as a preparatory type were of Divine origin, part of man's punishment and the proof of his degradation. When the "It is finished" left the lips of Christ upon the cross, "the veil of the temple was rent in twain," the way into the actual presence of God, the only true Holy of Holies, was made clear; the fiat was issued that not one stone should remain upon another of the material house, for from henceforth "God dwelleth not in temples made with hands." With the

abolition of caste there was an end to the ritual of caste. If a Christian is a "living temple," it follows that each man is a complete church in himself, with every possible and needful requisite within him, and that at the gathering together of the two or three such temples, constituting the service acceptable to God, is the giving expression to the only acceptable inward service, and that the worship of such private family or church needs but expansion to fit the more public family or church. Christ explained to His disciples the meaning of the old prophecies, types, and symbols in their application to His nature, work and office, and then, to test their appreciation of His lessons, asks them all, "And whom sayest thou that I am?" to which the warm-hearted, erring, and repenting Peter instantly replied, "Thou art the Son of the living God." St. John tells us that "Whosoever will confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God." In temple language this means that he becomes a living temple and a stone in the walls of salvation. Peter was the first to realize that the divine nature of Christ was the rock of our salvation. Therefore to honour him as the first Christian confessor, Christ goes on to say, speaking at the time in the Syrian language, "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona, flesh and blood hath not revealed this unto you; henceforth thou shalt be called Cephas," which is by interpretation a "stone," and on this rock, which Peter had just declared Christ to be, "I will found my church," that is, "thou shalt be called Christian," for being the first to "confess that Jesus is the Son of God." It is Peter who explains that all Christians are living stones, or Peters, and that the faithful men of old did eat of the same spiritual meat, and did all drink of the same spiritual drink, for they drank of that rock that followed them, and that rock was Christ. It is utterly impossible to devise words which more completely shut out the suspicion even that Peter could be a rock other than these used by Christ. A satanically false rendering of those words, and a wrong rendering of an old inscription at Rome recently, says Mr. Froude, proved to have had no reference whatever to Peter, are the two lying assumptions on which the Papal superstructure has been so long and so stoutly established. Anti-Christ in the builders' language means a false rock, and thus "the man of sin sitting in the temple of God, the visible church on earth, showeth himself that he is God"—that is, its rock. Infallibility being the logical deduction from such a premiss, and the claim of a worm of the earth to the uncommunicable attribute of the Almighty Father, having been allowed, the pronouncing of the "It is finished" completed the awful mockery, and the "mystery of iniquity" stands revealed to men and angels. The Bible placed all Christians on the pinnacle of greatness; the means used to bring them down involved falsification of ancient writings, falsification of ancient churches, deliberate forgeries, and atrocious cruelties inflicted on those who desired to abide by the simplicity that is in Christ—the object was to revive sacerdotalism, and it was illustrated by the invention of a ritual which makes gods of priests and serfs of Christians, and utterly destroys that family ideal Christ lived to effect, and died to obtain.

The Rev. Thomas Perry, Brighton, read the next paper, and said that in dealing with the subject it was neither possible nor desirable to do more than notice some of its main features, avoiding details, and therefore he would confine himself to historical statements, which might be considered authentic. There were three points of church ritual which had been the subject of a revived controversy in the Church of England, especially during the last quarter of a century, which were the forms of the chancels, the position of altars, and the shade, material, and colour of vestments. Other things had received their full share of approbation and reprobation, but those three were those commonly regarded as more prominent. He then took the question of chancels, and in an exhaustive *resumé* of the first introduction of them, which he ascribed to a period previous to the last four general councils to which the Church of England statutorily referred as a test of heresy, he traced their gradual extension, as also their purpose. In conclusion he said he would ask them to remember

the words of Pope Gregory to St. Augustine, "Whatever they found either in the Roman or Galilean or other church, which may be more pleasing to Almighty God, he thought it best that they should carefully select it and settle it, in the use of the English church, newly converted to the faith. For they were not to love things for the sake of the place, but places for the sake of the good things they found in them. Therefore they might collect out of every church whatever things were pious, religious, and right—and putting them together instil them into the minds of the English, and accustom them to the observation of them." (Applause.)

The Rev. Dr. Harrison also read a paper on the subject. It adduced principally the testimony of the early fathers in favour of Ritualism, and in a partial degree the evidence afforded by the Scriptures.

The Rev. G. H. Sumner said he would leave to those more learned in Christian antiquity and church ritual the discussion of those subjects. He had sent in to the chairman his card, as desiring to speak, in order to enter his protest against some of the points set forth in Mr. Elliott's paper. He desired solemnly to record his opinion, and that of some others, that in Mr. Elliott's paper there were statements which could not be proved by Holy Writ. It seemed to cut away from us the possibility of meeting together for purposes of common prayer and praise in houses especially set apart for the worship of God. (Hear, hear, and no, no.) While he objected to exaggerated ritual, in God's name don't let them fall into no ritual at all, for that would lead them into the wildest excesses of fanaticism. (Loud cheers.)

The Rev. Dr. Littledale, announced as the next speaker, said he should confine himself to a strictly historical statement. He went so far back as the Council of Ephesus in the fifth century, at which time the church broke up into five distinct bodies of Christians. Notwithstanding the formularies observed by them were laid down by fifty different liturgies, there was absolute agreement amongst them as to the use of special vestments by the priest in celebrating the Holy Eucharist, as to mixing water with wine, the use of lights, and the elevation. On these grounds there had been no gradual development whatever. It was apparent that they existed previous to the division among them. What happened in the ninth century was the result not of development, but it was the introduction of new fashions into the west of the old fashions of the east. (Hear, hear.)

The Rev. John C. Ryle said there was an intrinsic difficulty about the subject. Even the Royal Commission on Ritualism had recognised that difficulty. Although their work fully entitled them to the greatest possible respect, their views did not appear to have been harmonious. (Laughter.) But as the platform of the Church Congress was eminently the palace of truth, all schools of opinion were expected honestly to speak out their minds upon it. Hence, he would like to know where Christian antiquity began and ended. (Laughter.) How many centuries were covered by that vague expression "Christian antiquity." The evidence of Christian antiquity about church ritual was at best extremely scanty. (Hear, hear.) However far you might carry it down, it should be received with very great caution. Whatever might be the evidence of antiquity, it must never be pressed to the exclusion of the greater antiquity of the Word of God. (Hear, hear.) And when they came to consider, they found after all how little was said in the Bible about ritual. It contained nothing about altars, priests—(Oh!)—lights, garments, &c. (Much interruption.) Whatever was the evidence of Christian antiquity, we should not forget the evidence of experience, which might be less ornate, but was more safe. We must never forget the feelings of the great bulk of the people of England. As clergymen they should bear in mind that they had to do with a great number of people who knew nothing about the Fathers, and who would look jealously upon what, while borrowed from Rome, was not supported by the authority of Scripture. The people had not forgotten what had taken place in the struggle of the Reformation at Oxford and Smithfield, and they still retained a deep and keen dislike to anything approaching Popery. (Hear, hear.) He respect-