

From the Catholic Advocate.

THE TRUE CHURCH.

[CONTINUED.]

St. Irenous, a Greek by birth, but ranked with the Latin Fathers, and who, through St. Polycarp, his preceptor, was connected with the Apostolic times, said :

"Where the Church is, there is the spirit of God, and where the spirit of God is, there is the Church and all grace."* "We must obey the priests that are in the Church; those who have succession from the Apostles, who, together with the episcopal power, have, according to the good pleasure of the Father, received the certain gift of truth. But as to those who depart from the original succession, wheresoever they be assembled, they should be suspected either as heretics, schismatics, or as hypocrites."† "What if the Apostles had not left Scriptures, ought we not to have followed the order of Tradition which they delivered to those to whom they committed the Churches? To which order many nations yield assent, who believe in Christ, having salvation written in their hearts by the Spirit of God, without letters or ink, and diligently keeping ancient tradition. It is easy to receive the truth from God's Church, seeing the Apostles have most fully deposited in her, as in a rich store-house, all things belonging to truth: For what! if there should arise any contention of some small question, ought we not to have recourse to the most ancient Churches, and from them to receive what is certain and clear concerning the present question."‡

The same father, also, in his fifth book against heresies, says: "The teaching of the Church is true and stable, shewing to all men the same one path of salvation;" and further, "Every where the Church proclaims the truth."

St. Clement of Alexandria, a great father of the same age, declares that the "right doctrine is to be found only in the truth (or the true) and ancient Church;" and he maintains that "there is only one true Church that Church which is in reality the old one."||

Tertullian, in his prescriptions, maintains that "We are not to appeal to scriptures, neither is the controversy to be settled upon them, in the which there will either be no victory at all, or one very uncertain."... But,

"Wheresoever it shall appear that the truth of the Christian discipline or faith is, there will also be found the truth of scriptures, and expositions, and all Christian traditions."

And further, he maintains that,

"To know what the Apostles taught, that is, what Christ revealed to them, recourse must be had to the Churches which they founded, and which they instructed by word of mouth, and by their pistles "

He contended that these "Mother Churches" taught the truth, and that all other opinions "must be novel and false."§

Origen, who lived in the last of the second, and died in the beginning of the third century, and is numbered among the Greek fathers, says :

"Since there are many who think they believe the things which are of Christ, and are of different opinions from those who went before them, let the doctrine of the Church be kept, which is delivered from the Apostles by order of succession, and remains in the Church to this very day. That alone is to be believed for truth, which in nothing disagrees from the tradition of the Church."

And this father plainly says, that we are, "To draw intelligence from the scripture, according to the sense which has been delivered by the Apostles;" and that we are "not to believe otherwise than as the Church of God hath by succession delivered to us."*

St. Cyprian, a Latin father of this age, after maintaining the unwavering fidelity of the pure spouse of Christ, and the impossibility of her ever being defiled by adultery, says :

"Whosoever divideth from the Church, and cleaveth to the Adulteress, he is separated from the promises of the Church: He cannot have God for his father who hath not the Church for his mother."

And he asks :

"He that doth not hold the unity of the Church, can he think that he holds the unity of the faith ?"†

And Lactantius, who from the eloquence of his style, deserved to be called "the Christian Cicero," and who is classed with the Latin fathers of the fourth century, says :

"It is only the Catholic Church that hath the true worship and service of God; this the dwelling place of faith; this the temple of God; into which who entereth not, and from which, whoever departeth is without hope of life, and of eternal salvation."‡

Ruffinus, in his ecclesiastical history says that the great St. Basil and St. Gregory Nazianzen, "took the interpretation of scripture not from their own sense, but from the tradition of the Fathers."||

St. Cyril, of Jerusalem, of the same fourth age, testifies that the Church is called Catholic, "because she teacheth Catholicly, and without omission, all doctrines, which men should know, concerning things visible and invisible, heavenly and earthly."§

The same father in his fifth catechesis, says,

"Guard the Faith, and that Faith alone, which is now delivered to thee by the Church, confirmed as it is by all the scriptures."

St. Ambrose represents men as walking in the darkness of night, and says to them individually,

* Origen in his preface to his Periarchon, his Tract on Matthew, and Homily VII on Leviticus.

† St. Cyprian de Unitate Ecclesie.

‡ Inst. l. iv.

§ Ruf. Hist. Eccl. lib. 2.

|| Catechis. xviii.

"Let the Church point out the way to thee."*

Also this Father declares

"Faith is the foundation of the Church; for it was not spoken of the flesh of Peter, but of his faith, that the gates of Hell should not prevail: His confession overcame Hell: and this confession excludes many heresies; for seeing the Church, like a good ship, is beat upon by many waves, the foundation of the Church must prevail against all heresies."†

St. Augustine, whose works contain a great deal on this subject, among other things, maintains that,

"In the Church the truth resides, whosoever is separated from it, it is necessary that he should speak false things."‡

He also says, in his fourth book against the Donatists;

"That which the universal Church holds, and is not ordained by councils, but hath been always retained and observed, is most justly believed to have been delivered no other way than by Apostolic traditions, &c.... We must observe in these things: that which the Church of God observes: The question, therefore, between you, and ourselves is, which of the two, yours or ours, is the Church of God?"

This Father considered the authority of the Church the true guide of men in points of faith, and looked upon her decisions as conclusive.

He thus eloquently sets forth the authority of the Catholic Church;

"There are other things which most justly keep me in her bosom. The consent of peoples and nations keeps me there. The authority begun by miracles, nourished by hope, augmented by charity, confirmed by antiquity, keeps me there. The succession of prelates ever since the see of Peter, to whom our Lord, after his resurrection, committed the feeding of his sheep, to this present Episcopate, keeps me there; and finally the very name of Catholic, keeps me there; the which name this Church alone, not without cause, hath retained among so many and great heresies, insomuch that when any stranger demands where the assembly is wherein a man may communicate with the Catholic Church, there is not any heretic has the boldness to show him his temple or house, &c.... These many, and so strong ties, retain a believer in the Catholic Church."

He also declares emphatically :

"I myself would not believe the gospel were it not that the authority of the Catholic Church moves me."||

He further demonstrates, that the same Church which teaches him to believe the gospel, also teaches him not to believe those heretics (the Manicheans) against whom he wrote, and argues, that since these heretics admit that we must receive the gospel from the Church, it is madness in them to pretend to teach, the sense of

* De Incat. Domini.

† St. Aug. on ps. 57.

‡ Nist me Catholicæ Ecclesie commoveret

authoritas. St. Aug. Con. Fund.

|| In ps. xxxv.

* Irenous, Book iii. † Id. Book iv. ‡ Id. l. v.

|| Strom lib. vii.

§ See prescriptions of Tertullian, passim.