

## My Church Allegiance and My Reasons for it.

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I choose to be a member and minister of the Great Spiritual Brotherhood called the Presbyterian Church, within the Catholic Church of God,—in the first place, I suppose, because I was born within it, and nurtured amidst its ennobling memories. In the second place—after full thought, and after experience of God's work in many lands, and of the necessary defects which cling to all modes of Church organisation—the Presbyterian Church approves itself to my conscience and judgment as the best nursery of life and character. I honor and gladly recognise all the Churches which hold "the living Head Christ Jesus." Amongst these living Churches of Christ, the Presbyterian Church seems to me, on the whole, the most Scriptural the most brotherly, the best, fitted to make a people of Christ free, earnest, intelligent, liberal. I notice also that the other Churches, in our modern day, are borrowing more and more from the features of Presbyterianism—its popular Assembly representative-system, its presence and equal voice of the laity in Church courts, its spiritual equality of the ministry, the congregational right of its people (in keeping with the interest and faith of the Church as a whole) to elect their own ministers and spiritual leaders, and its principle of a common fund for the support of the ministry. By such a fund, while each congregation is at liberty to give to its own minister according to its affluence or ability and according to his ability, yet the ministers of struggling churches, who would otherwise receive inadequate support, have their ministerial income lifted nearer to a platform of equality. Thus, in the Presbyterian Church, there is avoided that shameful feature which has marked some parts of Christendom, where one minister of Christ gets a vast yearly sum, and the hardest-worked ministers in the country or in the cities' dingier places receive only a miserable pittance. The Presbyterian principle of ministerial support is at present winning the assent of Church leaders of all kinds as the wise and brotherly method—the one best fitted to carry an intelligent church life, with an educated and decently supported ministry, into the poorer districts of the country.

I will take, in order, some of the main reasons which appeal to my judgment as winning my allegiance to the Presbyterian Church.

### PERSONAL HISTORY.

It nurtured me and my forefathers; and for it they suffered and dared. Heredity means much in every department of life. In spiritual life its influence is incalculable. To any intelligent, spiritually minded man who knows what the history of the great Presbyterian Church has been ever since the morning of the Reformation, it is impossible to abandon or turn the back upon this splendid spiritual lineage.

As a student of Scripture and of Early Church History, I am led to the creed and the organisation of Presbyterianism. As the name implies, it seeks to keep close to the Early Christian Church of the Apostolic day, and of the first half of the second century. Pitt, the great Earl of Chatham, expressed this forcibly in a memorable sentence of a memorable speech: "The Presbyterians cling more closely to the college of (Galilean) fishermen than to the College of Cardinals; they contend for a Scriptural faith and a Scriptural worship." As Professor Sanday, of Oxford, frankly says—(if we except the peculiar activity of the Apostles themselves, whose office was necessarily a special and temporary one, and who could have no successors)—the Church of the Apostles' day was undoubtedly Presbyterian.

This can be seen by any unbiassed student of the New Testament. The Early Christian Church's organisation arose upon the model of the Jewish popular synagogue worship, with its *Synedron* or council of elders (presbyters) attached to each synagogue (or "congregation") and the brotherhood of these synagogues represented in a larger court of appeal of "the elders and brethren." St. James called the Christian Church by this name "synagogue."

### THE MINISTERIAL OFFICE.

I need not spend time in proving what is now admitted by the vast majority of eminent New Testament scholars of all schools, that, in the Apostolic Church, the *stated* ministry or office-bearers consisted of two kinds, and two kinds only, viz., of "presbyters" (which is the Greek term for the Hebrew word meaning "elders") and of "deacons." These deacons, it is admitted by all, were a new and special order appointed by the growing Church of Jesus to look after the needs of the Church's widowed, orphaned and poor. The presbyters or elders, on the other hand, were the Church's spiritual teachers and "overseers," attending to the ministry of the "word and teaching" and to the spiritual discipline of the believing people.

In the purely Gentile Churches, where the meaning of the

word "presbyter" or "elder" was not so well understood, the word "*episcopos*" (translated in our English Bible by the term "bishop") was used as its equivalent. The "presbyters" and the "bishops" were exactly the same persons, and in each congregation of any size there were several "bishops" or "presbyters." The people elected the "bishops." The "council of presbyters" ordained them.

This is evident in many passages of the New Testament. I will point to only two. In Acts xx. 17-28, the Apostle Paul addresses the elders (presbyters) of Ephesus, and calls them "*episcopos*" (bishops): "Take heed unto yourselves and to all the flock in the which the Holy Spirit hath made you bishops (overseers) to shepherd the Church of God." And in Tit. i. 5-7, St. Paul says, "Appoint *elders* (presbyters) in every city . . . for the *bishop* (*episcopos*) must be blameless, as God's steward." These passages, says Bishop Lightfoot, prove that in the New Testament the words "bishop" and "presbyter" "are synonymous," and mean "the same office." Even Canon Gore, the High Churchman, confesses that in the first century "the presbyters and the *episcopi* were in fact the same persons."

Furthermore, it was the Council of Elders (presbyters) to whom belonged the function of *ordaining* the Church's ministers. Even when an apostle was present at the appointment of ministers, he took part only as one elder among the elders. Thus, though the Apostle Paul took part in the ordination of Timothy, he did so only as a member of the "presbytery." Timothy was set apart to his ministry "by the laying on of the hands of the presbytery." And so the Apostle Peter writes, "The elders (presbyters) among you I exhort, who am a fellow-elder" (1 Peter v. 1.)

Bishop Lightfoot has proven that this apostolic custom of presbyterial ordination continued in some regions of Christendom for several centuries, and only gradually did it give way before the growth of prelacy. He quotes Jerome's authoritative declaration in the fourth century: "Before factions were introduced into religion by the prompting of the devil, the Churches were governed by a council of elders (presbyters)." The truth of this verdict of Jerome, says Lightfoot, could not be denied. In "the succeeding ages bishops and Popes accepted it without question."

### THE PRESBYTER.

At the Reformation, when men discarded the growth of mediævalism and of priesthood in the ministry, and searched in the New Testament itself for the model of the New Testament Church, Protestant Europe in general restored the Presbyterian system of the Church's organisation. Only in a few Protestant countries, where the royal power and prerogative gave a special bent to the Reformation movement, was the Presbyter form of the Church's ministry and organization not adopted. Thus the Reformed Church, in almost all lands save England, took the Presbyterian form of Church Government. And the Lutheran Church of Germany, though contrasted with the Reformed Church in a few minor points of doctrine and administration, is practically Presbyterian. It holds the priesthood of all believers, the equality of the clergy (or ministers) and the union of ministers and laymen in Church courts for the government of the Church. In common with the Presbyterian Church (strictly so-called) the Lutheran Church also discarded prelacy and the sign of Apostolic succession as mediæval after growth, and as perilous to the true spiritual succession of the believing Church of God. The Presbyterian Church thus includes the majority of National Churches of the Protestant countries of Europe as well as many of the Free Churches throughout Protestant Christendom. The Huguenot Church of France, with its tragic story of valor and martyrdom, the Waldenses of Italy, the Church of Switzerland, both National and Free, the Church of Holland with its glorious assertion of freedom, the Reformed Church of Germany and the Rhine land, the Protestant Churches of Bohemia and Hungary, are Presbyterian. In Scotland the National and Free Churches, including over 80 per cent. of the population, are Presbyterian. In Ulster, Presbyterianism is the most living spiritual power. In all the British Colonies it spreads. Of the United States of America I will speak lower down.

Even in England, where the Reformers were themselves bishops, and adopted the diocesan Episcopal form of Church Government, they without exception, recognised the Presbyterian Church as a truly Scriptural Church with a truly Apostolic ministry. In the earliest and best epoch of the Puritan age Presbyterianism was adopted as the one National Church of the Three Kingdoms. In the dark day of the return of Charles II. and the Stuart despotism to power, the Act of Uniformity drove from their parishes over 2000 of the best of England's clergy, men like Richard Baxter and the rest of the heroic band. The great majority of these were Presbyterian. By a series of cruel and repressive measures Puritanism was trodden under, the Presbyteries forbidden to