

The Bishops of Palestine understood that their brethren of Asia had adopted a doctrinal view of the question, and so expressed themselves in a synodal letter which they sent to Pope Victor. Their chief, Theophilus, of Casarea, called them together in council, and when he had shown them his commission from the Holy Father, they expressed their concurrence with the Universal Church as to the time of celebrating Easter, saying that the practice was derived from the tradition of the apostles. They declared, moreover, that their Brethren of Asia *had strayed from the true belief*, and that their conduct could not meet with the approval of the Church, especially as they held that their view was of Apostolic institution. It was this *erroneous doctrinal belief*, therefore, which Pope Victor hoped to correct by means of excommunication which, as Chief Pastor, as was universally recognized, it was in his power to apply. That there was an error of doctrine is still more clearly shewn by the reconciliation which, through the mediation of Saint Irenæus, Bishop of Lyons, soon after was brought about. This eminent prelate prevailed with the Asiatics and induced them to abandon the doctrinal error which they connected with their practice. Upon this the Pope did not hinder them from adhering to the custom of their country, merely as a disciplinary regulation. The word of a Pope, however, is of great weight even when it does not concern doctrine; and that of the venerable Saint Victor was not without effect, and the faithful Christians of the Asiatic Churches, guided by its light, conformed, as the historian, Eusebius relates, to the universal custom of the Catholic Church. This happy conclusion must have been reached soon after, in the time of Pope Anatolus, who ascribes the reconciliation of the Asiatics with his predecessor, Saint Victor, to the good services of the renowned Saint Irenæus of Lyons.

Thus was the authority of the Pope, as successor of Saint Peter, universally recognized, one Church only dissenting for a time and finally abandoning its dissent. Notwithstanding the violence of the heathen persecutions and about a hundred years before they ceased, this supreme authority was everywhere firmly establish-

ed. The Bishop of Rome ordered councils to be held in the most remote nations of the Roman empire and beyond the bounds of that empire, and in obedience to his orders councils were held. In those councils doctrine and discipline were discussed; and the result of their deliberations was imparted by synodal letters to the chief Pastor. It was made manifest to all, and handed down to future ages by the most glorious testimony,—the testimony of all tribes and tongues and people of the known world that throughout the vast extent of the Church, east and west, in lands of great renown, the very centres of the earth, where Niniveh and Babylon flourished of old, as well as in Italy and Gaul, there existed unanimity of belief and practice. The Church, therefore, was ONE,—ONE in doctrine and her important discipline. From the action of Pope Saint Victor and other chief Pastors of the early time it is clear that the Popes did not wait till the middle age, nor till any future age, for an explaining, unfolding and developing of their high commission. They understood it and acted upon it even as they professed it, from the first. "Confirm thy Brethren" (*confirma fratres tuos.*) Such was the charge delivered to each one of them in the person of Peter. The duties of this charge they all, in their day and generation, faithfully fulfilled; and if the fulfilling of them in the time and by the ministry of Saint Victor, came to be attended with an unwonted degree of notoriety, celebrity, glory even, it was not without a purpose in the Providential guidance of the Church. That purpose was, need it be said, that the whole body of the people of Christ should be closely united by the ties of their common faith and discipline,—that they should be ONE, as their Divine Master prayed that they should be. (John 17, 20, 21, &c.) It must be admitted, considering the distinct record that has come down to our time, that in order to learn what was taught and believed in the beginning and the ages which immediately succeeded, discussion is not so necessary and will not be so profitable, as a fair and unprejudiced examination of the annals of the past.

We cannot think of the time of Pope Saint Victor in the second century without calling to mind the wonderful growth,