

THE Rev. Dr. Thomas S. Childs, of Washington, D.C., who has lately applied for holy orders in our Church, gives as among his reasons for leaving the Presbyterians: "There are two tendencies in the Presbyterian Church, one toward disintegration, and one toward unity. This tendency toward disintegration is that which produced the wide differences of opinion. I find in the Episcopal Church a doctrinal faith in substantial harmony with my own. I find a communion of saints, in which I hope to enlarge the experiences of the past and have a pledge of the still wider communion of the future. I hold as satisfactory the basis of the Christian union proposed by the House of Bishops of the American Episcopal Church, and revised by the Lambeth Conference. The first three terms, the Scripture, the Creeds and the Sacraments, could hardly cause serious discussion among Protestants. All accept them. We are unable to see why there should be any more difficulties with the Historic Episcopate. Calvin admitted it; the best historic scholarship of our age, the House of Bishops, made their deliverance intelligently and honestly. They do not ask us to accept any particular theory of the Episcopate. They ask us to accept the fact; and there is the fact, whether we accept it or not. We are unable to see a simpler basis of union than this."

### THE BIBLE.

The network of the written Word betrays a *visible society* behind it. It is surely impossible to deny this. We are not going into the further question as to the various books being afterwards marvellously wrought into unity, if so they were; nor are we asking how far the Holy Spirit may have gradually brought home to the consciousness of the Society the greater security and practical sufficiency of the written as compared with the spoken Word. We are looking straight at the fact of that first moment in the life of Christianity, and if what we then see is a written word embedded in the soil of a living society, it can scarcely be supposed that at some critical moment later on the two were separated and one of them practically extinguished. It is not the relation of the two to one another that we are investigating, but the reality of their co-existence, and this co-existence we claim to find inside the pages of the Bible. As, then, we examined last week the indirect evidence for this fact, this week we shall speak of evidence which may be called direct, and which, inasmuch as it is intended to be taken along with, and not separated from, our last paper, we shall consider under a second heading. Our assertion is that the New Testament Scriptures exhibit the formation, the order, and the continuous life of a society. And, first, what do we mean by a society? How do we distinguish a society from a crowd? A crowd is an accidental number of individuals, each independent of the rest, and having no common interest to make them one. A society, on the other hand, means a number of individuals gathered together in place or thought, and animated and governed by one idea. Thus a society of human beings implies subordination, and therefore requires dependence; its parts are related and proportioned, and therefore it has form. Whereas a crowd is a mere shapeless mass with absolute independence for its very life; it is a number of separatists, of whom any one may shift his place as he will without the whole ceasing to be a crowd; it is without conscious life, because its members, if so we may call them, abhor intercommunion among themselves.

2. The New Testament we say, then, exhibits the gradual formation of a *Divine society*, and this society was and was intended to be the

*visible vibrating medium* of the spoken Word. Numbers of people are shy of the word "medium" in connection with revealed truth; if so, surely they must quarrel with the Apostles, nay, they must hold an argument with our Lord Himself, for there, in the very heart of the New Testament, it is safely lodged. God did not speak merely from heaven, but upon earth, and upon earth His Word became incarnate. 'The word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory . . . Here, then, is a visible manifestation in the flesh; that is, in fact, what God has to say to us. But more than this, if we may say so with reverence, that incarnation multiplied itself, the very law of its life being expressed in our Lord's solemn words: 'As the Father hath sent Me, even so send I you'; and again, 'He that receiveth you receiveth Me.' If these two sentences do not compose a medium, where shall we find one? The truth is that, with many of us, the words have touched our ears without reaching our minds. We venture to offer this remark with all deference, to Lord Grimthorpe and his friends. 'He that receiveth you.' Let them seriously ponder those words, and they will find themselves confronted by a visible society. Let them further dwell upon the words which follow—'receiveth Me'—and they will know that society to be Divine. Is it just, then, to declaim against the idea of this word medium, and to use the light of the written Word to burn up one of its most conspicuous pages? You cannot manage revelation; your highest wisdom is to submit to it. The principle of a visible society is set up in the fact of the Incarnation, and its reality is preserved in the first Apostles.

True it is that our Lord Himself said, 'Come unto Me, all . . . ' and thus issued an invitation at once universal and direct; but how many heard the words when He uttered them, and how do we come to hear them now? His invitation necessarily vibrates through a human medium; human, because composed of men; Divine, because instituted by the Son of God. Mozley somewhere says that there are men who simply ignore the whole sphere of 'means.' They love to speak of God's word entering the heart; they forget the truth that God's Word has in fact entered a 'society.' Look at the very words of the subject and say whether the Bible itself is not the first to protest against a strained and exclusive use of it. Its expressions are at once significant and progressive: 'Follow me'; 'Disciples' (i.e., learners of the Lord); 'He breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained'; 'Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature . . . ' 'Followers,' 'Disciples,' 'Apostles,' 'Teachers,' whose message is to be received in faith. Is not this a living society? What strikes us with peculiar force, when we come to dwell upon it, is the complete absence of any command to *write* anything. Take what view you will about what is sometimes called sacerdotalism—and, of course, it is easy to point to its abuse—still, we repeat it, the fact, luminous and not even admitting of argument, the fact of that first moment of Christianity is a *visible society* of men, and those men, priests,—if the power to forgive or retain sin, means the priesthood,—a visible society with a message entrusted to it, and with a command enjoining not merely the duty of proclaiming, but the manner also—'Preach the Gospel.'

After our Lord's Ascension there was a small, living and moving society. And now watch its progress. It moves, and grows larger as it moves. Others become attached to it, not it to others. Sometimes large groups of men, sometimes solitary individuals, hear the spoken message, and are in consequence baptized into it. We all know the passage in the Acts, but we constantly miss its significance, 'Then' (i.e., after

hearing Peter's preached word) 'they that gladly received his word were baptized; and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued' (mark the words) 'steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and in prayers' (Acts, ii. 41, 42). What does this mean? Nothing else than this, surely, that that first band of Christians was a society, the individual members of which knew and greeted one another. 'All that believed were together,' and even shared one another's goods; and further, that the multitude did not deduce their message from the Old Testament, but received it through their ears, not eyes, into their hearts from the lips of the Apostles. The Old Testament was the ground common to both teachers and taught, and the Apostles appealed to it in support of a message they had come to preach. Afterwards, as time went on, of course questions of observance and doctrine came up, and then a council was called or a letter written as occasion required. It was not 'Let every man do what is right in his own,' but 'It seemed good to us.' To whom? Read the fifteenth chapter of Acts, and you will see, 'Then pleased it the Apostles and elders with the whole Church' (xv. 22.) 'We have sent, therefore, Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth.'

And if we pass on to the Epistles, where we find the Church beginning to get well under weigh, there is no cessation of this order, but an evidence that it is acknowledged and an anxiety that it should be retained. That which our Lord Himself has called 'My Church' is now called 'the pillar and ground of the faith.' And what our Lord had said about a man being regarded as a heathen man if he refused to hear the Church is repeated by St. Paul when he says, 'Avoid those which cause divisions.' Or, again, to Timothy, 'Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me; and again, 'Let no man despise thy youth.' A Bishop, according to St. Paul in his letter to Titus, must 'hold fast the faithful word as he hath been taught; and as for the unruly, he must 'rebuke' them 'sharply,' that they may be sound in the faith. In other words, as it has of course been often observed before, the word 'Churches' (plural) is only used to denote the different places in which may be found the Church. The message given is authoritative and it is *one*, and the medium for conveying it is the *Visible Church*. This neglected aspect of the written Word was represented to us by the great Oxford leaders, and we are only gradually appropriating the vision.—X. in *Church Bells*.

### DEACONESSES.

The following is a summary of the proceeding in the upper House of Convocation, Canterbury, on this question. We lately gave the Bishop of Winchester's remarks at some length. He presented the report of the committee appointed to consider the subjects of sisterhoods and deaconesses, which was contained in a series of resolutions. It was agreed to discuss these resolutions *seriatim*.

The Bishop of Winchester moved, and the Bishop of Rochester seconded, the first resolution, which was carried. It is in the following terms—

'1. That this House, recognizing the value of sisterhoods and of deaconesses, and the importance of their work, considers that the Church ought definitely to extend to them her care and guidance.'

In regard to the second and third resolutions, a prolonged debate took place, which is fully reported in the *Guardian*. Eventually they were passed in the following terms—

'2. That those who enter the sisterhood should be permitted, after an adequate term of