

THE
CHURCHMAN

APRIL, 1887.

ART. I.—THE APPEAL TO THE DOCTRINES AND
USAGES OF THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH—WHAT IS
ITS VALUE?

DOES it close the question when we can say for certain "The early Church did so," or, "The early Church thought so"?

Was there a Golden Age, before the doctrines and customs of the Church could be distorted or soiled by lapse of time or inroad of human infirmity, in which the undivided Church was, like our first parents in the Eden story, for a short period pure and spotless, having received the framework of her perfect constitution for all time from her Divine Founder, and being governed by men who had drunk truth such a little way from the fountain-head, that for all practical purposes they might be regarded as infallible?

Just to narrow the question, let us first ask—Supposing there *were* such a Golden Age, how long did it last?

That such a Golden Age lasted through a couple of centuries is an idea which it is difficult to treat seriously. The fathers of the early Church seem to have been so very similar to the fathers of the later Church in the diversity of their opinions, that a corpus of doctrines and ritual founded on their infallible authority sounds something very unsubstantial indeed.

I shall ask my readers to confine their attention to the theory we are examining in what would certainly seem to its holders its most reasonable and incontrovertible shape, namely, that in which infallible authority for establishing the forms of Church doctrine, discipline, and ritual for all ages is only claimed for the Church during the lifetime of the Apostles and their younger contemporaries, so that we shall use the words "primitive Church" in their strictest sense.

Should we see reason for doubting the position thus mode-

rately stated, our arguments will all apply *a fortiori* to the expansion of the theory, which puts the Church even of the subsequent age on a pedestal beyond the reach of criticism.

Two little questions suggest themselves on the threshold. The first is trite enough, *What should we naturally expect Christianity to be like, a priori, if it must differ from Judaism in being catholic, for all races of mankind and for all the ages till time should be no more?* We should *not* expect, surely, a second laying down of exact ordinances and statutes in detail, like the so-called Mosaic system, but something wider and deeper and less dependent on local and temporary conditions.

The second question is scarcely less obvious: Supposing that such a pattern primitive Church ever existed, *what should we expect, a priori, to find in its records?* Surely, whether the system of regulations were imposed on the Church as its constitution by its Divine Head before or after the day of Pentecost, we should *expect to find*, immediately after, rigid uniformity of doctrine, discipline, and ritual; we should look for constant appeals to such a system directly after it had been imposed as deciding all controversies. Differences of opinion, whether between individual Apostles or between local churches, would (we should feel sure) be met, not by a discussion of the bearing and application of principles or by any other form of argument, which would be waste of time, but by a distinct reference to the standard once delivered to the saints.

In a word, we should expect to find Church order taking shape, not by any law of continuous growth or development, as in the case of other institutions, but born full-grown, clear-cut, as Minerva from the head of Jupiter.

Does all this sound like a description of the impression left on the mind by reading the Acts and the Epistles? I trow not. Do not the historical facts give more countenance to the very opposite theory? Had the Apostles been given eternal principles to guide them, the constitution of the Jewish synagogue to work from, the meeting of the needs of their converts for practical life and devotion to aim at, and the general injunction "let all things be done to edifying," and nothing more, should we expect to find the history very different to what it is?

So much for expectations *a priori*.

But to proceed. If we are to adopt the theory of an infallible authority having laid down for the Church in primitive days a complete system of doctrines and discipline for all time, we must adopt it in one of two shapes. We must either suppose that our blessed Lord Himself mapped out in detail for His disciples, *vivâ voce*, the organisation of His Church during the Forty Days; or we must adopt the hypothesis that a

general consensus of inspired authority laid down such a scheme during the lifetime of the Apostles and their younger contemporaries.

As to the former alternative, the silence of the Apostles on the subject, when reference and appeal would (*ex hypothesi*) have been surely inevitable, seems conclusive. If we have an unrecorded saying quoted in the Epistles, it is of the same character as the rest of our Lord's teaching recorded in the Gospels, laying down, not a regulation of Church order, but a principle of the Christian life. "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

Yet it is not possible to say that St. Paul (whose minute directions to Christian bishops and their congregations are those we have to take as types of the rest) showed no willingness to refer to the authority of our Lord, when it was in his power. Quite the contrary. Though he was keenly alive to the fact that he had a right to claim a respectful hearing for his advice as an Apostle and an inspired Apostle ("I think also I have the Spirit of God"), yet he never imagined for a moment that his words could be weighed in the same balances as the words of the Master Himself (It is "not I but the Lord" who says, "Let not the wife depart from her husband"). And yet neither he nor any other Apostle, so far as I can recollect, appeals to our Lord's authority to establish any rule of Church order, constitution or ritual—beyond the two sacraments. Does the Apostle discourage marriage, or forbid women to speak or appear unveiled in the congregation, he argues the question at length. Nothing in fact can be more characteristic of his mode of teaching than the words, "I speak as to wise men; judge ye what I say." We are obviously only obeying his injunctions when we do "judge" how far his advice on any point is applicable to present times and conditions.

So much for the notion that the Apostles had a reserved charter of detailed instructions on Church order, which had been delivered to them by our Lord before His ascension. Had not men of some prominence favoured this hypothesis, I should have felt an apology necessary for pointing out its groundlessness. A hypothesis to be of any value must surely be intrinsically probable, and explain facts which otherwise admit of no explanation. This raises insuperable difficulties, while it explains nothing that cannot be more easily explained without it. In a word, it does not fit the facts.

So I think we may confine our attention to the other alternative, which does not attempt to trace the "perfect constitution" any higher than the Church of the first century. Here we must find it, established either by general consent or by general council, or by universal usage, if we are to find it at

all. Can we, therefore, do better than try to get a glimpse of the highest authority of the early Church at work? We shall thus, perhaps, be able to watch the process of crystallisation, when "our organisation, our discipline, our regulations for all time" were actually being framed and settled.

In the decision of the Church Council at Jerusalem—at which the whole Church, laity as well as clergy, seem not only to have been in some sort represented, but to have had a voice, though St. James alone pronounced sentence as president—we certainly have the very highest authority that we can possibly associate with the primitive and undivided Church. Yet, what do we feel (to take the subjective point of view first), about its precise enactments? Do we or do we not appeal to them as authoritative for every age, and feel it our duty to preach against black puddings? There seems to my mind no middle course here. It is a question that only admits of a categorical answer. Is it "Yes" or "No"?

At the same time I should be very sorry to assert that the Church of Jerusalem had any intention of laying down the law for all future generations when it decided the burning question of the day. Its decision might be described in apostolic language as "good for the present distress," and we have no reason to suppose that it was mistaken. But even were we to see reason to think it had been mistaken, we should certainly not be asserting our liberty in a degree unsanctioned by our own Articles in so doing. The words in which infallibility is denied to Church Councils are familiar to all of us: "Forasmuch as they be an assembly of men whereof all be not governed with the Spirit and Word of God, they may err, and sometimes have erred even in things pertaining to God." Those of us who do not pretend to believe in an infallible Church of any age—primitive, mediæval, or modern—and who cannot believe even in the possibility of one age stating truths in such terms as shall exactly correspond with the increased knowledge, or laying down such regulations for Church order and worship as shall exactly correspond to the changed conditions and needs, of all the ages to come; we who refuse in any way to give up the right of private judgment on all such matters, but who none the less unreservedly allow and rejoice in the power of a living Church in any country or age to formulate its beliefs in the best terms it can, and decree rules and ceremonies such as it shall find "very convenient to be observed"—we enter upon the next stage of our examination with light hearts, however perplexing its results may seem to those who wish to find in the early Church "an image which fell down from Jupiter," in regard to which our only duty is to reproduce its exact lineaments from age to age.

Let history tell its own quiet story, and put an end to doubts.

If our present ecclesiastical system prove to be an exact reproduction of the condition of things at any age of the Church whatever, then, of course, it will be our duty to discover what authorities impressed that seal upon that age.

But if we find nothing but proof of gradual growth and change, of adaptation and assimilation, then we shall be driven to the position of inquiring what *reason* we have for each of our modern Church institutions and customs, as well as what *authority*. We shall feel that no authority, however respectable, will bear the weight we want to throw upon it. We shall be, perhaps, content with asking whether, in any addition to or modification of the old structure, we are still building on the only true foundation—the foundation the Apostles themselves built on—the eternal principles revealed to us in the life and words of Christ Himself.

Our inquiry will naturally take the form of an examination into the history of certain Church institutions, our object being to notice what departures from the habits and customs of the primitive Church took place during the centuries which followed.

The first we note is the gradual emphasising of the distinction between the Presbyter and the Lay Brother (involving the disappearance of the laity from the Councils of the Church), and concurrently the gradual advance of the Chairman of the Bishops or Presbyters to something like what we should now call “episcopal authority.”

Of these changes my learned friend Dr. Bigg, in his “Bampton Lectures,” not yet published,¹ writes: “The Church of Alexandria was driven along the same road which other Churches were already pursuing. The lowering of the average tone of piety and morals among the laity threw into stronger relief the virtues of the clergy, and enabled them with a good show of justice and necessity to claim exclusive possession of powers which had originally been shared by all male members of the Church.” Dr. Bigg then proceeds to relate how the Rectors of the twelve city parishes in Alexandria who enjoyed the singular privilege of electing from among themselves, *and of consecrating*, their own Patriarch (exercising a sort of episcopal jurisdiction in conjunction with their President), gradually lost this power towards the close of the second century. And he closes the account with these words: “Thus was finally abolished the most interesting relic of a time when there was no essential difference between Bishop and Priest,

¹ This paper was read before the Liverpool Clerical Society, September 6, 1886.

and of a later but still early time, when the Bishop was Chairman or Life-President of a Council of Priests, by whom the affairs of a great city-church were administered in common."

A second early departure from the customs of the primitive Church was the disjoining of the Eucharist from the Agape.

A third was the stereotyping of the time of Baptism. I believe it is considered to be proved beyond question by those who know much about the early ages of the Church, that Infant Baptism was scarcely the rule during the first two centuries—astonishing though it is to find the controversy still alive in the fourth century, when the holy Monica refused to allow her son St. Augustine to be baptized till he could himself profess a real faith in Christ.

Fourthly, we do not forget how the Christian principle of unselfish love took the form of absolute division of property between all the members of the primitive Church in Jerusalem, though the system afterwards proved unpractical and impracticable. (It is, however, doubtful whether such action could be described as having ever been enjoined.)

Fifthly, we have the undeniable authority of St. James for the practice of unction when visiting the sick; and yet it has fallen into disuse in our English portion of the Church.

Then again, sixthly, we notice that Church discipline, as enforced by St. Paul, was directed against *moral* offences only, and that he appears never to have dreamt of approaching those Corinthians who did not believe in a future resurrection with threats of excommunication, but with argument and persuasion, to which "primitive custom" the Society of Friends still, I believe, remain true.

In glancing over these examples, I shall be surprised if most people do not feel the same natural impulse which I confess to. I mean a tendency to criticise each position as it comes up *on its own merits*.

Thus we feel *sorry* that the position of the laity in the councils of the Church is not what it was in primitive days, and we wish to restore it.

We feel *glad* that the Chairman of the Presbyters, or Bishops, was gradually invested with more authority, as *par excellence* "Bishop," than he enjoyed in the primitive Church, because we see that when the Apostles had been taken away, the Church must have stood in need of rulers.

Again, we are *glad* that the Eucharist was soon dissociated from the Agape, and fenced round with a solemn service.

We are *sorry* that the liberty of opinion noticeable in the primitive Church should have been in later ages so seriously curtailed; that free thought should have been considered during many ages of the Church little better than a crime.

The faith delivered to the saints, the gospel that was handed down in the early Church, consisted, we cannot help observing, almost entirely of historical facts: the words and actions, the death and resurrection, of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The doctrine, or teaching, of the Apostles consisted almost entirely in thus bringing Christ Himself before the people as the ground of all hope, the exemplar of conduct and the standard of truth, "in knowledge of Whom eternal life" consisted. *Sound* doctrine or teaching, as dwelt upon by St. Paul in his pastoral Epistles, was a very practical thing indeed. To prove this it is enough to refer briefly to the context in which the words "sound doctrine" ("healthy teaching," marg.) occur (say) in the pastoral Epistles.¹ The warning, "If any man teacheth a different doctrine and consenteth not to sound words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness, he is puffed up, knowing nothing" (1 Tim. vi. 3), follows upon practical advice about elders who rule well being counted worthy of double honour; about a little wine for the stomach's sake; about slaves not despising their masters on the plea that they were brethren.

Similarly, in 2 Tim. iv. 3, "The time will come when they will not endure the sound doctrine," follows immediately on the words, "Reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and teaching."

It goes without saying that "holding the pattern of sound words" (2 Tim. i. 13) implied the value of even verbal accuracy in dealing with "faithful and wise sayings" handed down; and similarly over and above the practical virtues necessary for the Bishop (or Priest), "that he may be able to exhort in the sound doctrine and convict the gainsayers," he was to "hold to the faithful word which is according to the teaching" (Titus i. 9). But the Apostle quickly returns to the practical thoughts with which the words seem bound up in his mind (cf. *Ib.* ii. 1): "But speak thou the things which befit the sound doctrine: that aged men be temperate, grave, sober-minded, sound in faith, in love, and in patience; that aged women likewise be reverend in demeanour, not slanderers, nor enslaved to much wine," etc.

Now, what we want to consider is this. *Are we right in thus exercising our private judgment on these questions?* Or is it our duty merely to study them somewhat after this fashion? Was the Church undivided when that custom was

¹ In 1 Tim. i. 10, "the things contrary to the sound doctrine" are summed up as murder, uncleanness, men-stealing, lying, and false swearing.

changed? Was the change consummated in the primitive time? Then it is authoritative and above criticism, and we must hold to it, whether it approves itself to our judgment or not.

As I write these words I am reminded of an ancient description of good Bishop Jolly, who was said by his contemporaries to have "an authority for everything, a reason for nothing." I am reminded, too, of a powerful paper read before the Derby Church Congress a few years ago by the Head Master of Clifton College, in which he pointed out the absurdity of the geographical metaphor which pictures free thought and authority as holding sway over two territories, one of which can only be enlarged at the expense of the other.

What we surely need is to combine free, fearless, truth-loving, practical examination of a subject, with sober respect for the conclusions of the wise in past ages.

What we surely need is adaptation to the wants of each age by a process of living and growing. The refusal to develop, the clinging to cast-iron types and moulds of the past, is the conservatism, not of a living organism, but of a mummy; and the result of such rigid changelessness is what? A sudden rush of air and daylight comes, and the wonderfully preserved mummy, which has not changed its shape or constitution for thousands of years, crumbles into dust!

Christ is Christianity, and Christianity is, or ought to be, Christ. The eternal principles He taught and exemplified are the essence of the Church's life, doctrinal and practical, and have taken, and may yet take, many different forms in different races, different climes, different ages. The refusal to recognise Christianity unless it wears our favourite clothes, or at least conforms to our manners and customs, is a mistake which has much to answer for. Christianity is Christ. Whatever may not be found in His divine words, or proved thereby, should not be required of any Christian to be accepted on pain of exclusion from the Christian pale. Loyal respect for Church authority, loyal obedience to Church authority, are Christian duties, as are also loyal respect and obedience to civil authority; but such respect and obedience are compatible with perfect freedom of opinion in the domain of conscience, and refusal to acknowledge any infallible authority except Christ Himself; and compatible also, it is hardly necessary to add, with earnest struggles for reform in Church or State, wherever we believe the formulæ or institutions of the past unsuited to the needs of the present.

The appeal of an individual to the words of Christ (or indeed to the words of His inspired Apostles) seems to some minds presumptuous, and they ask, indignantly, who can claim to have sufficient learning to interpret them on his own

authority differently from the Doctors of the particular Church of which he is by God's providence a member? But for English Churchmen such a question has no terrors. It is so obviously the mind of their Church that they should be driven back upon private judgment, wherever uncertainty of Scripture interpretation gives fair warrant for varying opinions, that her carefully balanced words can be loyally used by both parties in many a controversy. Those who wish to be told exactly what to believe on every question,—and can persuade themselves that accepting on authority what does not seem to their own judgments true or right, is believing,—must naturally gravitate to the Church of Rome or the Particular Baptists, or some other of the many bodies which claim infallibility.

In addition to the varieties of type which we have noticed in important institutions and ceremonies, there are some trifling instances of the powerlessness of authority (as the word is generally understood) to hold its own against the dictates of the universal reason, or common sense, which may be worth noticing. For just as we illustrate some great geological law by pointing out the deposit of mud from a streamlet running down the hillside, so may it be shown how great Church institutions have altered, and are still altering, by pointing out the law of change at work on some trifle.

The custom of saluting our fellow-Christians with an holy kiss has not been enforced on the Western Church in spite of the repeated injunctions of SS. Peter and Paul. We consider a friendly nod or shake of the hands a faithful, though free, translation of the custom into English.

Similarly we note considerable changes in the outward and visible signs of both the Sacraments. There is little doubt that baptism by immersion and reclining at the Lord's Supper were the ordinary practice of the primitive Church; and yet "not by any decree of Church Council or National Parliament" (to paraphrase some well-known words), "but by a general sentiment of Christian liberty has the remarkable change taken place which has made sprinkling the ordinary practice of the English Church;" while the same wish that all things should be done "to edifying," led no doubt to the adoption of a reverent posture by the recipient at the Holy Eucharist.

The spirit has been maintained at the expense of the letter.

When we hear or read of the intense horror expressed by some worshippers of the letter at the use of unfermented wine in the Holy Communion Service—going to the length of using words which imply (if they mean anything) that the spiritual value of the rite depends on the fermentation of the liquid, we are—well, we are reminded of Bishop Jolly.

I once heard just such an one rather pompously ask a

missionary Bishop, generally understood to hold what are called "high" views, across the table, "I suppose, my Lord, you have always managed to have wheaten bread for the Blessed Sacrament?" "Bread! Good gracious; no!" was the astonished reply. "I have been glad enough sometimes if I could get a little rice."

Oh, Bishop Jolly, Bishop Jolly! Would that your spirit were as dead as your body!—in one sense.

Had but our own dear English Church provided from the first a Service of Dedication (or Presentation in the Temple) for those infants whose parents conscientiously believed, like the holy Monica, that Baptism ought to be put off till conversion, one great breach in the unity of the Church might never have taken place—we might have retained the Baptists. Had she only in time known the things that belonged unto her peace, and welcomed the enthusiasm of lay evangelists, she would not have lost the Wesleyans. Had she not, in common with the State, insisted on a compulsory uniformity of worship, Dissent would never, surely in any shape, have attained its present giant growth.

Had the Chinese system of providing iron shoes for all feet never prevailed in the Christian Church, how different would have been the history of Christian Missions!

There is a Church which the circumstances of my life have led to my being well acquainted with, the Russo-Greek Church, which has, far more than any other portion of the Church Catholic, clung to the exact customs and practices of early times. Unreasoning horror of development or adaptation has been the "note" of the Greek Church for many centuries. Infant baptism had been not only generally accepted, but enriched: (1) with such exorcisms as we find in our first English Prayer Book; (2) with the anointing of chrism (or consecrated oil) by way of confirmation; and (3) with the simultaneous administration of the other Sacrament, when the growth of the Church was arrested as by petrification, and all its then existing customs stereotyped for the use of future ages. With what result? Why, we find the most conservative Church in Christendom also about the most lifeless. It is not too much to say that in it religion and morality, which God has joined together, are too often put asunder. One learns in Russia a lesson one is never likely to forget—that no reverence for primitive, or nearly primitive, doctrines and customs—no exact reproduction of the forms of the past—can make a Church living; much less can it keep the Church in touch with the lives of the people.

A living dog is better than a dead lion: a living chapel than the grandest ecclesiastical museum.

There is such a thing—we are unhappily getting only too familiar with it—as cutting yourself off from all the experience of the past and the “authority,” which is but that same experience finding utterance and exercising its due influence. There is such a thing as advocating revolution and anarchy, that every man may do that which is right in his own eyes, and sheltering yourself behind the honoured names of Reform and Liberty. While it is my object to distinguish the principle of free growth as a sign of healthy life, from mere mechanical reproduction of the forms of the past, I hope I have not seemed to throw any doubt on the necessity both for authoritative regulations of Church doctrine and discipline (to be from time to time revised), and for loyal obedience to be paid to the same.

I can hardly give better proof that the position I am contending for is liberty, not license, than by taking shelter behind the great name of Hooker, and closing my paper with a quotation from the Fourth Book of the “Ecc. Pol.,” chap. ii.:

“The glory of God and the good of His Church was the thing which the Apostles aimed at, and therefore ought to be the mark whereat we also level. But seeing those rites and orders may be at one time more which at another are less available unto that purpose, *what reason is there in these things to urge the state of one only age as a pattern for all to follow?* It is not, I am right sure, their meaning, that we should now assemble our people to serve God in close and secret meetings; or that common brooks and rivers should be used for places of baptism; or that the Eucharist should be administered after meat; or that the custom of Church feasting should be renewed; or that all kind of standing provision for the ministry should be utterly taken away, and their estate made again dependent on the voluntary devotion of men. In these things they easily perceive how unfit that were for the present, which was for the first age convenient enough. The faith, zeal, and godliness of former times is worthily had in honour; but doth this prove that the orders of the Church of Christ must be still the selfsame with theirs, that nothing may be which was not then, or that nothing which then was may lawfully since have ceased? *They who recall the Church unto that which was at the first must necessarily set bounds and limits unto their speeches.*”

F. DAUSTINI CREMER.



ART. II.—NEW TESTAMENT SAINTS NOT COMMEMORATED—ANANIAS.

THE city of Damascus is at once one of the most ancient and of the most beautiful cities in the world. It existed in the time of Abraham. Tradition makes it his resting-place in his migration to the promised land; and history points it out as the birthplace of his faithful steward, “this Eliezer of