

ART. II.—THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY NOT A SACERDOTAL PRIESTHOOD.

IF a new priesthood and a continued sacrifice had been instituted under Christianity, it is clear that the sacrifice itself, and the order of men who were to offer it, would have been as clearly indicated as they were under the former law. It would not be left for human ingenuity to wrench out a text from the body of the Christian Scriptures, and so to pervert its obvious meaning as to neutralize and even destroy the whole system of Christianity, and actually to build upon it an earthly kingdom which is contrary in its first principles to the heavenly one instituted by Christ Himself. We cannot but believe that if a sacerdotal and even dynastic system had been contemplated by our Lord, He would have instituted a new Levitical order, and a dynastic succession like that of Aaron, and marked with unmistakable clearness the line in which it should be carried on. But the Petrine claim and that of the episcopate to carry on a sacerdotal succession and a dynastic rule is at once obviated by the principle of a corporate or collegiate succession carried on by the whole Church, a principle we have already established. The "unity of the body," and not the unity of the individual, is the ideal of Christianity—a unity which originates in Christ, and in the union which every believer enjoys in Him. For we are not first one with the Church and then one with Christ. To be "*one in us*" makes union with God in Christ the first principle and point of union, and then union with one another in and through Christ.

To this first union sacerdotalism opposes a fatal obstacle. It erects a wall of separation between the soul and its immediate access with God. We need not such a chamberlain to bring us into the presence of the great King. We need not a second mediator to interpose between the one and only Mediator between God and man, even Jesus Christ. Our great High-Priest is still in His temple, as the typical one was of old. The gates of the living temple are still open to every suppliant. We may all enter, even as Hannah did in the day of her affliction, and no door-keeper in the person of an earthly priest has received any authority to exclude us. "Sirs, we would see Jesus," was the demand of the strangers, who had only heard of this great Deliverer, and the apostles to whom they appealed undoubtedly did not detain them or intercept them in their divinely-inspired request. All who have felt the joy and the comfort of that Divine Presence might well claim a like freedom. And unless the claimant of sacerdotal power can prove his authority for offering up a sacrifice for our sins, to

supplement, and, even in some sense, to supersede the sacrifice of Christ; unless he can prove to us that that sacrifice is still unfinished, still has to be completed by a constant repetition or continuation of it, he has no right to intervene between our souls and the Redeemer, or to deny our immediate access to the throne of grace; else we should be in a worse case than they were who enjoyed only the temporal presence of Christ, but who came to Him without any restraint or intervention. In that peaceful and happy day there was no obstacle, no wall of separation interposed between Christ and all the sorrowers and sufferers who sought His presence. It is only a want of faith in His eternal presence and nearness to us, even in the day of His glory, which has rebuilt in the continued sacrifice and the earthly confessional a wall of partition like that which He came to remove. It is the fruit of a want of faith in His continuance with us which has created in too many minds among us a desire for some visible token that He has not "forsaken the earth"—some vicegerent of Christ upon earth, in derogation of that only "Vicar," who was appointed by Christ Himself, His Holy Spirit, who was to abide with His Church for ever. From the promise of Christ, "It is expedient for you that I go away," the faithful (in the words of Wiclif) "derived the truth that Christ, who promised the faithful to abide with them for ever, wished to remain for ever without any earthly vicar in His heavenly kingdom, in order that they might by aspiring in conversation and desire to heavenly things concentrate their affections in the Lord Jesus Christ."

But what would the sacerdotalists gain even if they could establish their priesthood, their proper altar, and their continuous sacrifice? They would rather be travelling back to the imperfect days of type and shadow, than passing onward to the perfect state of the Church, when even the last traces of our imperfection shall vanish, and the Church shall be completed in glory. Christianity stands midway between the Jewish Church, with its representative priesthood and ritual, and the glorified Church, from which every earthly element and every token of imperfection will pass away for ever. As yet imperfect, it must (as St. Augustine shows) have some few outward signs and sacraments to show that it is still militant on earth. But as it is advancing towards its great consummation, it cannot burden itself with a ritual and ceremonial system, and thus "build again the things it has destroyed." And the heaviest of all its renewed burdens would be a revived priesthood, the return from its high ministerial service of Christ to a kind of "service of tables." Can any title of earthly or heavenly dignity be higher than the simple title of "minister of Christ?" Did the apostles claim any higher one? They

remembered too well that their Lord had come "as one that serveth," and that He commended to them the same service. The faithful servant has a nearer and more confidential relation to his master than the highest priest can have. But in the case of the disciple, Christ has so elevated this service as to declare it to be a friendship. "Henceforth I call you not servants, but friends." The service and ministry remains indeed unchanged in its devotion, but enhanced in its merciful appreciation. We are raised to the high position of the "father of the faithful," and become the friends of God in Christ. Could the highest priesthood bring us nearer to our great High-Priest, or make us dearer to our glorified Master? It would but put us farther from Him; it could but renew the distant relationship of the day when the earthly priesthood was needed, only because the eternal Priest had yet to come.

III. But the history of the Christian ministry, and the nature of its transmission, gives us no less clear an argument against the revival in it of a sacerdotal priesthood. From the deacon up to the bishop, from the bishop to the pope, every officer in it was in earlier ages elected by the whole body of the church or congregation in which he was designated to officiate. Every power and right of ministration was a delegated one, rather representing the whole body than an inherent jurisdiction. This truth, and the consequences arising out of it, greatly obscured in the Middle Ages, were recovered in the synodical period of the fifteenth century by the greatest canonists of the age. Among these, the illustrious Bishop of Avila, Alphonsus Tostatus, was one of the most conspicuous. His view of the origin of ecclesiastical jurisdiction is given us in these words: "Jurisdiction in *act* cannot devolve on a community, but on a determinate person, for it requires action either of judgment or government. But jurisdiction in its origin and in its virtue is in the community, inasmuch as all persons who receive it receive it by means of the community, because they as individuals can exercise it, but not the whole body. And this seems to be the case in regard to the keys of the Church, for these are given by Christ to the whole Church. But as the Church cannot collectively exercise the power, as it is not an individual, he gave it to Peter, in the name of the church." Having shown that the keys were not also given to the other apostles, he proceeds: "They were not given to them as to specific individuals (*destinatis personis*), but as ministers of the church. . . . And since after the death of Peter the keys remain in the Church, the Church can elect a successor to him, and by electing him can transfer to him the same power which Peter had" (in Num. c. xv.). He then illustrates his argument from secular communities and colleges in which the entire jurisdiction is in the community, and adds: "The same appears

evident from the fact that, in the vacancy of a see, the entire jurisdiction devolves upon the chapter, except that of order. For if it existed in the prelate himself it would have expired with him. Whence it appears that the root of the jurisdiction is rather in the Church than in the bishop."

But the undeniable fact that the elective principle ruled also in the matter of orders—that the people constituted even in this case the electorate, and exercised a right of selection which could not be set aside by the clergy who consecrated—proves that the ministry under Christianity is not a sacerdotal one—a truth which the very nature of a proper priesthood most clearly indicates.

For though we can conceive an elective monarchy (as in Poland in former days) it is not so easy to realize an elected priesthood. In the former case the relation is between the people and an individual of their own nature and order; the electors and the elected have a natural equality and a direct relation to each other. But an elective priesthood, in which by popular choice an individual is placed in a new relation with the Deity, is simply an absurdity. It is within the popular power to elect someone to minister to the congregation, and to go forth to preach the Word and minister the Sacraments of the Gospel; but an elective priest, in the proper and sacerdotal sense, would be an anomaly and an incompatibility. A sacerdotal order and dynasty must ever spring from a Divine choice, clearly and supernaturally revealed, as in the case of the former priesthood. None but God can originate such a relation between the creature and the Creator. The Christian ministry rather springs from the necessity of a division of labour among those who in the Gospel have been called, one and all, into the closest relations with Christ, and form a universal, though spiritual priesthood, than from a separation of class or distinction of caste. All cannot become apostles, or all prophets, or all teachers, though all have some labour to undertake and some ministry to fulfil. It is in this unbroken unity of origin and equality of membership that the work of the Church is to be carried on and the union of all its parts preserved and consolidated. From this point of view alone we can look on to the fulfilment of those glorious promises which form the bright horizon of our faith, and see them in all their brightness, distant, indeed, as yet, but ever within sight of the believer, who, like the saints of old, "sees them afar off, and is persuaded of them, and embraces them."

Finally, let us bear in mind that the ideal of the Christian religion is that of a Saviour, a Companion and a Guide ever near us—visible to our faith, felt in our life. It was only when the consciousness of this living and life-giving presence died out in the Church that a proper priesthood and a visible

sacrifice was invented to supply its loss. An earthly vicegerent was then substituted for the only representative of His presence which was left us by Christ as His last gift—that Holy Spirit whose presence among us those who created a new priesthood were so little able to realize.

The presence of Christ was sought in the priesthood and in the sacrifice of the Mass, which became rather screens to hide the truth of His spiritual presence than guides to direct us to it. The relations of Christ to the individual believer were merged and lost in those of the Church, and thus the first great tie between our souls and their Saviour was strained, and at last too often entirely broken. Are we safe, are we wise, in invoking the same danger, by admitting the claims of a new sacrificial priesthood, thus renewing in our day that eclipse of faith in the present Saviour which rendered the darkness of the Middle Ages so deep and hopeless?

It was this that rendered the prayers and hymns of that earlier age so cheerless in their beauty, and dimmed the glory which the Gospel has revealed to all flesh. Even the exquisite hymn of Cardinal Newman, "Lead, Kindly Light," has in it too much of the fear and gloom arising from the uncertainty of the constant presence of the living Guide, who, as the Light that lighteth everyone who cometh into the world, clears up to His children not merely the single step of his journey, but lightens all his paths. I once asked the Cardinal to supplement this beautiful prayer with a hymn indicative of this risen glory, this perfect day, which Christ has become to all His people, in the brightness of whose coming "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light." Let us ever remember that this Light is given not only for our guidance, but for our warmth and life. If this thought be constantly borne in mind we shall never be led to interpose between Christ and our souls a sacerdotal order, through which we shall see Him only "as through a glass darkly." We shall be led to bring others also into the full light of His truth and of His life, and shall "rejoice in the ministry we have received of the Lord Jesus to testify the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts xx. 24).

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ART. III.—THE OLD CATHOLIC CONGRESS AT LUCERNE.

THE Old Catholics have had two objects before them. One is to win the right of worshipping God according to their consciences; the other, to combine right-thinking Christians in